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THE SEVEN VICES

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THE SEVEN VICES

by

GUGLIELMO FERRERO

Through the lives of the group of characters in this titantic novel, Signor Ferrero presents Rome three decades ago—magnificent in its power and in its corruption, a mysterious Rome of palaces, vice, and ruins, ruled by a new aristocracy of merchant princes. An accusation of murder is the central theme. The young wife who is convicted of poisoning her husband becomes, like Dreyfus in France, the center of a network of conspiracy which touches the lives of many people. The hero, Oliviero, son of Rome's wealthiest senator, becomes involved in Suzanna's defense and narrowly escapes prison. He is an idealist, and yet he is dissipated, one of "The Seven Kings of Rome," or "The Seven Vices," as he and his friends are called. His life is dominated by his love for the woman he is trying to rescue, by his passion for a Venetian countess, by the hatred of a jealous rival, and by his conflict with his ambitious father.

It is a picture of a society in which a declining aristocracy fights with the representatives of new wealth, of people who are pleasure mad and blind to honesty and justice. It is also the dramatization of a state of mind which involved society in the capitals of all Europe and which found its logical end in the Great War.

Volume One is entitled "The Two Truths"; Volume Two, "The Son's Rebellion."

Translated by ELIZABETH ABBOTT

Harcourt, Brace and Company
383 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK

TIDE HOUSE

by

MAUDE CALDWELL PERRY

Matthew Gulick grew up with the gaunt young tideland town of Argyll in the Pacific Northwest. The son of a scalawag, he was himself but a shifty pagan, filled with an uncertain, unreliable strength which drew him into danger and seeming defeat. It attracted three women who influenced his life: Mrs. Mallory, an Easterner, cool, brittle, attractive, the wife of one of the Olympians who had founded the town that he loved; Kittie, the adventuress to whom he was so very passionately attentive—even after his marriage; and elemental Bruna, playmate of boyhood, whose insistence finally captured him. But more important than these was the love he had for his town, his Argyll, which he always desired to rule like an old Olympian. This single idea, this driving force that Tide House symbolizes, torments him at last to a strange, crooked victory.

The book is not only the story of Matthew's unceasing struggle; it mirrors also the gigantic activity of the Northwest, and gives a picture of the rugged, pioneer country growing civilized.

Harcourt, Brace and Company
383 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK

THE SEVEN VICES

PART TWO
THE SON'S REBELLION

THE SEVEN VICES

A NOVEL OF ITALY IN OUR OWN TIMES

by Guglielmo Ferrero

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY

ARTHUR LIVINGSTON *and* ELISABETH ABBOTT

II. THE SON'S REBELLION

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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THE SEVEN VICES

PART TWO: THE SON'S REBELLION

CHAPTER I

THE initiation into evil—inauguration of true virility—had begun. The day before, in the joyous certainty that Susanna would be acquitted, Oliviero had felt himself brother to the Dioscuri, taming wild horses in the full face of Rome: and with a light heart he had scoffed at the stupidity and the wickedness of men. But he did not know the enemy he was intending to subdue. He had heard men speak of the injustices in the world, as he had heard them speak of volcanoes on the moon—he had never felt an iniquity in his own conscious substance. That morning on reading in a newspaper that the Court of Prosecutions had remanded Susanna to the Assizes he felt as if he had awakened suddenly at the bottom of one of those lunar craters, as if he were on some other planet . . . Was it possible! Was it possible! . . . And if there was no Justice, if the innocent could be condemned and the guilty absolved . . . what then could one be sure of?

At the garrison he had to exert himself to remember where he was, that he had soldiers and duties before him. That incomprehensible mystery! How stunned Accolti must be! And Susanna! Poor Susanna! She might die in prison. And those others, the enemy, his enemies, the "Kings of Rome"—how exultant . . . and how despi-

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cable! With his brother officers he exchanged half-audibly the few syllables strictly necessary to the performance of routine; but how, at certain moments, as great flares of rage would sweep over him, he would shout and swear at the soldiers—he, the one officer the men liked, perhaps because he never lost his temper, never vented his personal spites on their defenseless hides! That "neutral," that "impartial" judge, that hypocritical jurist of the "ifs" and "buts," once so fatal to Susanna and at the crucial moment betraying Justice again! Science! Science! First it blunders and then it lies, and your newspapers and your lawyers, standing there ready to help it cheat the public—a dumb, vulgar, besotted public only too eager to be cheated. What was he doing there? Was it not his business rather to rush out on the streets and shout his contempt in the face of the world? Two kinds of people: those who would condemn the verdict—they would be his friends; and those who would approve it—they his enemies. A multitude, the friends, a handful, a handful of imbeciles, the enemy—of that he could be sure! Why, everybody, almost, had been agreed the week before —agreed that Guicciarelli had proved himself an ass, and that Susanna would be acquitted. Every decent man alive would condemn the unfair judges. And the thought of this presumable consensus of the majority gave him a beginning of consolation.

The irksome turn of duty at the barracks done, he dashed home to talk with his mother. Donna Edvige had read the news in the paper just as she was making final preparations to leave for San Remo. Her first thought was to rush to Florence to console Accolti, visit Susanna in prison, obtain permission from the authorities to move the girl to a place where she could receive proper care, find such a place in Florence, a convent perhaps, that would receive her. And she would have hurried off that very afternoon had that not been a day when the Alamannis were keeping open house in one of their formal

receptions to princes and dukes, diplomats and legislators, satraps of Power, magnates of Gold.

Oliviero fervently approved his mother's plans. They must move Heaven and earth to save Susanna! And his father—what had his father said?

Donna Edvige had brought up the question of the decision with her husband on announcing her design of leaving for Florence. The Senator had objected.

"If you do such things, it will look like a protest against the decision in the face of a public opinion which—do not deceive yourself—will be approving it. The verdict is open to criticism, I admit; but it was the only one the court could render, and in the long run it will prove the lesser evil. Guicciarelli made a mistake; but after all he is a Senator; he belongs to the best academies in the world, and yesterday he got the cross of St. Vladimir. If an Italian court were to hit him a slap in the face, just today . . . well, who would be the gainer?"

"Susanna!" replied Donna Edvige promptly. But this ambiguous, half-hearted shuffling on the Senator's part had not been to her liking, and she sensed that it would seem even less laudable to her son. She tried to soften the disagreeable answer she would have to make to his question.

"Naturally he was not pleased with the decision. But you know how your father always looks at things . . . from a sort of political or strategical point of view. I suppose he has to, on account of his position. He says the decision was unjust, but that the judges could hardly have decided in any other way . . . that business of the Russian decoration and all . . ."

This first expression of a contrary opinion was like a knife thrust at Oliviero's heart. So his father thought there was a way to explain and excuse the decision? He was so stunned that at luncheon he did not dare speak of the case, not knowing just how to broach the subject. Vainly he waited for his father or his mother to advert to it. Donna Edvige sat silent, grave. The Senator chatted

on and on in a half soliloquy on the most disconnected topics, but especially on General Baratieri in Africa, and his favorite corollary to that theme: "Italy needs a little war to shake her up morally, make her forget Cavalottis and Cavalieris, parliamentary graft and 'moral questions,' to save her from the mire that is getting deeper and deeper about her knees!"

Oliviero knew this tune by heart, and paid scant attention; but he understood that his father had begun the lecture to evade the question of the decision at Florence. So he sat silent, struggling inwardly to convince himself that the public at large could not possibly approve even if his father were wavering . . . The *Mezzogiorno*—it was true—had featured the news and hailed it as the latest of its victories: but that was understandable: that rascal of a Comte de Barge had compromised himself too deeply. But the evening daily that had been contending all along, be it with proper caution, that Susanna was innocent, would adopt quite different language, and with it everybody who had been following the vicissitudes of the case impartially. That was the way it was—that was the way it had to be! . . . But that self-conscious silence that hung over the luncheon table like a cloudy sky over a countryside in June! That effort of all three of them to avoid speaking of the one thing each had in mind! . . . Oliviero was worried.

The moment he could leave the table, he went out, in search of some distraction to dispel his uneasiness—a long wire to Elena, and a longer one to Accolti, begging them to return: flowers for Susanna, with an address boldly, proudly written on the package: "Signora Susanna Cavalieri, Santa Verdiana Prisons, Florence"—as boldly, as proudly, as an address to the "Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome." Wandering about town in the freshness of that brisk sunlit day, far away from the oppression of his father's presence, and by sheer dint of repeating his own views to himself, he all but convinced himself in the end that the public must not, could not, approve the verdict;

and he went back home to dress for the reception in the actual certainty of basking in the warmth of a friendly consensus.

Instead his first impression was of a general indifference. No one mentioned the decision. It was as though no one had read the papers, or indeed ever heard of the Cavalieri case. At first intimidated, then angered by this attitude, Oliviero finally introduced the subject himself, out of spite. But he found himself confronted with a universal reconversion. If there were two or three heretics, moving, for that matter, with very cautious step, the others not only approved the decision, but in some cases gave new expression to the old hatred of Susanna. There were praises for Guicciarelli and his Science for baring the mystery of the "vanishing poison": others disliked circumstantial evidence but found the presumptions of guilt against Susanna of such weight as to dismay the most impartial and benevolent minds. There were even those who found the decision "in the interest of the accused, at last enabled to defend herself in open court!" Here and there came malicious references to Susanna's supposed "affairs"—a phase of the case in which the ladies in particular preferred not to appear ingenuous. That there was not at least one man, and perhaps more than one—well, who were they trying to stuff with that?

Oliviero contained himself for two hours, arguing amiably, but the crisis came toward six o'clock, when he found sitting alone on a sofa in a corner of the small drawing-room "la bella Giuditta," who had just arrived, considerably late.

The whimsical tongues of society had hit on this ironically decorative epithet for a woman famous for her ugliness in the Capital Mayfair. Midway between thirty and forty, "the beautiful Judith" was already ageless and sexless. But if Nature had not endowed her with the bloom of youth nor the lines of a woman, she was intelligent, cultured and rich in the extreme. Her family, justly respected by three generations for its activity, its charities,

its learning, its love of letters and the arts, and a certain old-fashioned conventionality, was still in the lead, after a century's wear and tear, among those which had issued from the ghettos of the Serenissima after Campoformio to take up the splendorous inheritance of the Venetian patriciate. A pianist of distinction, and not bad as a painter, Giuditta lived to satisfy an insatiable appetite for beautiful things—music, pictures, sculpture, decorations, landscapes, literature of every kind, even the kinds more substantial than the ordinary novels and short stories which were circulating among the women of those days.

But she criticized the beautiful and the ugly with such contempt for all canonized opinions, all official stamps, that every one of her admirations was a protest and a secession, when it was not a frank revolt and a challenge to battle. "A rabid futurist!" whispered the light talkers of Rome, disconcerted, if not overawed. In the last judgment of genius over which she daily presided, Raphael was one of the "daubers of canvas," and the Renaissance an ill-starred parenthesis of decadence between glories. For Giuditta crowned with highest honors, among all the centuries, the fifteenth, then scarcely known, and the seventeenth, at that time frankly defamed. Bernini, master of corrupt taste according to official canons, she admired as the greatest sculptor since the Greeks; and the gay gorgeous baroque as one of the greatest creations of Italian genius. Alessandro Manzoni she relegated to sacristans and pious old ladies—"the only public," said she, "that can stand such insipidity." She attained the frenzy of a Pythoness at the Tripod in praising Wagner, the picturesque musician of the German sagas, and Segantini, the poetic painter of the Alpine glaciers, in those days the two poles of contradiction between the admirers of the antique and the lovers of the modern. Though such judgments tended to frighten the majority of people, who considered her eccentric, not to say half mad, a few minutes after she entered a drawing-room all the people of

brains and culture were to be found in a circle about her: and often, for the sheer pleasure of discussing serious subjects in her company, were quite oblivious to other ladies, even the most beautiful, who were buzzing about them.

But if some were right in calling her intelligent, others were not wrong in regarding her as a little peculiar. She had married a man as handsome as she was ugly, as stupid as she was intelligent, as poor as she was rich. He had died, three years before, like Elena's husband—by a fall from a horse. Why she ever married that brainless and penniless Antinous was a mystery unsolved. Women she hated, and they repaid her coin for coin: she shunned their conversation as she would have the plague, and averred she smothered in any room where more than three skirts were to be counted together. She did not have a woman friend except Donna Edvige, whom, moreover, she could not forgive that trail of plaintive females she was forever towing along behind her out of pure goodness of heart: Elena Asterio, the Countess Maria, the Marchesa Scramble-Along, and all the others in "the infirmary." She sought the company of men only, but even with them she showed her temperament, now doting, now freezing, now admiring, now despising—loving and hating from one day to the next, most often capriciously, without any reason visible at least to others. Some days she would be gay, sparkling, full of fire, loquacious; on others she would crawl into her shell, sulk in a corner, and it would be impossible to get four words out of her. At one time she would seem to be omnipresent in Roman society: then, all of a sudden, she would disappear, and her friends would hear eventually that she was sitting on the peak of some Alpine mountain or meandering among the sands of Egypt. Some secret demon surely was tormenting that woman: but what it was and was like, no one, not even Donna Edvige, had ever succeeded in discovering.

Among the legions of Susanna's many accusers and defenders "la bella Giuditta" had been so far neutral—a neutrality of indifference: she had not deigned to read a

syllable about the case. Oliviero, however, was aware of her tendencies to despise mob judgments.

"There at least is an intelligent woman!" he thought. "With her I can speak my mind."

He approached her.

"I have reached my limit! For two hours now, I have been wasting my breath in behalf of poor Susanna. No one is willing to think . . ."

But softly, in a voice as tranquil as it was decisive, the lady replied:

"That Susanna is a pest. I can't endure the woman. If I were a juror I would send her to jail for life. I forbid you to mention her name to me!"

Offended by the sentiment and by the tone as well, Oliviero stared at the lady a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and, deliberately rude in manner, said:

"Oh! don't worry! Don't worry! . . . I'm off!"

And he withdrew, not only from the lady's presence, but from the reception, from his father's house. He could stand no more—he needed a breath of air.

But there in the street he came face to face with the evening papers, cried in loud shrill voices by the newsboys. They too were doffing their hats to the verdict "generally expected" after Senator Guicciarelli's "decisive explanation" and "satisfying to public opinion" because "it was better for everybody, and for the defendant in particular, to refer judgment to the public, which never went wrong."

The initiation into the evil of the world had begun. But Youth touches heaven and the depths with equal facility. That morning Oliviero had left the barracks certain that the world agreed with him. Now his father's attitude, the talk at the reception, the response of the oracles of twilight, had completely overturned the exultant courage of the afternoon at the Quirinal and the self-assurance of his angry morning. In the evening darkness that seemed to lie like a crushing weight upon the city, he was certain now that every one disagreed with him. No longer was he brother to the Dioscuri! Alone, bewildered, impotent be-

fore the invincible obstinacy of Everybody-Nobody, he stood aghast at an Earth gone wild in a reversed revolution. Precisely! The incredible and the impossible—those were the realities. Everybody he had quarreled with about the Cavalieri case, even His Most Serene and Most Asinine Highness, could now cry "We told you so!" The Cavalieri woman, Senator Guicciarelli, Malaguzzi, the Comte de Barge—they had won, and they had a right to crow. Susanna would die in prison at the age of twenty, because a famous alchemist would not admit an error: because an Emperor went tossing his baubles blindly about for any one they happened to strike; because a lawyer of repute did not choose to lose a case . . . And nobody was protesting, everybody was approving! For the first time he was awakening at the bottom of one of those lunar craters which he had seen hitherto only through the telescope: for the first time he found himself in the presence of Evil victorious and impregnable.

"What rotters people are, anyway, mamma!" Oliviero protested, on reëntering his home when sure he would find it "cleaned," as he said, of all those "outsiders." His mother shook her head:

"Most people are not even wicked—they are just cowards!"

"But I don't understand what they are afraid of! What would they have risked, all those men and women, if they had said, in our house, that the decision of that court was an outrage?"

"They would have risked looking like people who think with their own heads. That strikes you as a simple matter for people who are trying to live in our world? The truth is that every day there are opinions we must all profess, just as on certain occasions we have to wear evening gowns and dinner coats!"

"And there's Donna Giuditta! Joining in the chorus! And she brags of being born a rebel!"

"In art, she is. Otherwise, there's not a woman in Rome more in awe of your duchesses and princesses."

"What's the use then of wealth, education, title?"

But his mother did not answer. Instead she elected to acquaint her son with a change in her plans:

"Do you know—I am not going to Florence. We are going to bring Susanna to Rome."

Among the guests at the reception had been her confessor, a pious French prelate, canon at the Lateran. She had talked with him about Susanna and asked his help in finding a retreat for her in Florence. The priest knew of no convent such as Donna Edvige desired either in Florence or in the neighborhood, but there was one in Rome—on the Celio, a sisterhood of English nuns who sometimes received the sick—he would speak to the mother superior the next day and Donna Edvige would await the answer at Rome that she might be ready to act quickly if the sisters consented. Donna Edvige belonged to a charity interested in prisoners. She had a certain experience in such matters. She foresaw that in obtaining permission to transport Susanna to Rome she might have to overcome many difficulties.

The news that the nuns had consented to shelter Susanna enabled Oliviero to get through the next day till ten o'clock in the evening, when Accolti arrived from Florence. Oliviero's mother accompanied him on the drive to the station to meet the faithful defender of tormented innocence.

"What happened?" exclaimed Accolti, when all three were seated in Donna Edvige's carriage. "Why, what happened is that once more a rascal, a coward and an honest man chanced to find themselves in company and, as usual, after due procrastination the coward made common cause with the rascal to knock the honest man on the head!"

If Oliviero had no difficulty in identifying the rascal, he was mistaken as to the coward and the honest man. The coward who had tipped the scales of Justice in accord with the rascal was not the third, the neutral, judge who had been in doubt all along: it was that other, Ac-

colti's friend and schoolmate, the judge who "was a political appointee" and had hitherto stood for Susanna. The "neutral" had "thrown a white bean." The other had been frightened by Marietta's arrest, by the new charges of subornment, by Guicciarelli's "vanishing poison," by the uproar in the newspapers and the reawakening of public hatred against Susanna. He had gone over to the enemy on the ground that there were so many difficult and suspicious circumstances in connection with the cases that it was better for every one concerned to have the whole affair cleared up in open court.

"All on account of one vote, one vote!" exclaimed Oliviero desperately, at the end of the long and torturing narrative. But Accolti stopped with his foot lifted for the next stair (the two were going up to his apartment) and said:

"Oliviero, you are young, and I'm not sure I envy you. I have, at least, a chance to be rid of this rotten game within a reasonable time. You are in for a long go at it! But remember what I tell you: you will always find Truth and Justice succumbing in this country by one vote. The rascals have a majority of just one. But with it they do and undo what they choose. The real revolution would be for a king, for a government, for a party, an institution, an angel, or the Devil himself, to shift that cursed vote!"

Neither Accolti nor his two companions in sorrow knew that the one vote which had stunned them had been the "stroke of the Cardinal" by the *vir dolosus*. What would they have said if they had known that Malaguzzi knew the niece of a Cardinal, having saved her in a case involving one of the then frequent extortions by blackmail? The lawyer had seen the niece, and the niece had seen the Cardinal, and the Cardinal had seen . . . that that certain newspaper, Blackest of the Black, and passing as the authorized mouthpiece of the Holy City, should denounce Guicciarelli's "Science" as an imposture of secular and Masonic Rome: that then the *vir dolosus* might run

to the Lodges and demand that the Court of Prosecutions take up this latent challenge of the Inquisition, defend the honor of free-thinking Science, the Science with a capital "S" but without a God!

When Oliviero came to the new stories that were going about as to Susanna's lovers, Accolti looked at him steadily a moment: and then said with a sardonic smile:

"Let me tell you a little story which so far I have told to no one but your mother. You know that Signora Cavalieri has always been blaming Susanna for not having had children, as though that were part of her crime. 'What's she good for?' she used to say. 'She can't even give me a grandchild!' Well now, shortly after Susanna's arrest when everybody was making her out a regular Messalina, one of the most reputable physicians in Rome came to me, and said—can you imagine what! He said that a month perhaps before her husband's death, Susanna had consulted him as to the reasons why she had not had any children and as to how she might have them. But the physician, on due investigation, was obliged to tell her that her husband should have been the one to seek the advice, not she! She was not at fault. . . ."

"Alberto . . . then! . . ." exclaimed Oliviero in astonishment.

"Just so! Just so!" answered Accolti. "The Messalina who enmeshed even you in her toils is as innocent at the age of twenty as she was when she was born! You seem surprised. But there are all kinds of women in the world, even—though few, I admit—certain incombustible ones without curiosity, and who never of their own accord suspect the existence of certain mysteries. When one of those women stumbles on a husband like your friend Cavalieri—for there are husbands like him, too—she may look for a child for years and years, hopefully, under a cauliflower! . . ."

If on news of the court's decision honest men and women had reason enough to weep, the rascals, on their side,

had a chance to laugh their bitter laugh, as is often and perhaps properly their earned reward.

The alchemist had quite forgotten his rage at rereading himself in the *Mezzogiorno*. He remembered, instead, that Malaguzzi had opposed the publication and in what language, and that even the Comte de Barge, at first blush, had not been so sure either.

"These lawyers!" thought Guicciarelli. "What are they good for but to lose cases in court? And these journalists! . . . Lucky that we are here, with Science to man the breach!"

And since your mob of swine, your public, had sided with him and saved him, he at once rediscovered in the masses an infallible scent for the best good. The future, therefore, belonged to democracy: and blissful that he could sit once more, secure, admired, worshiped, on the throne of his competence arcane, he would have been satisfied never to hear of the Cavalieri case again.

Nevertheless, for three days past he had been climbing tirelessly up and down the hard stairs of Power, panting, growling, and cursing the modern feudatories of pen and ink, actually to obtain that little post for Pietrucci on the Food Commission.

The Comte de Barge for his part had not forgotten anything. On the contrary he remembered perfectly well the scornful gesture with which he had swept the Senator's science into the editorial potter's field. But he was glad of it; because he thought he had once more shown, first by refusing and then subsequently by publishing, that he knew his business, in other words, that he had "a feel for the moment."

"These scientists!" thought he. "Take them away from their stew-pots and what are they good for? Lucky I'm here at this desk with my fingers on the public every hour of the day, every day of the week!"

The lawyer, in his turn, had not forgotten his prediction that to introduce those two twin substances would

ruin the case. He knew that the confusion between pycrotoxin and pycrotine had saved his life—but only because he had corrected the situation by his slogan of "the vanishing poison."

"If I had not been on hand to turn the omelette with the newspapers, a fine, friendly favor that fool of a Camuffi was doing me!"

Whereas Donna Emilia knew that she alone had had eyes where every one else was blind or eyeless. It was she who had scented in the pycrotine the proof of Susanna's diabolical malice; and she was more stubbornly bent than ever—now that the Law was beginning to give credit where credit was due—on having a massacre—Oliviero, Marietta, Gaetano, Senator Alamanni; and she rose in her fury the moment the lawyer ventured the suggestion that it was dangerous to overdo things . . . That was just one little fly in Malaguzzi's ointment . . .

The only one who was not boasting was the one who could have boasted with most reason, if boast there were in the fair emprise. When all was said and done, Senator Alamanni had done it all. Eager to smooth Donna Emilia's fur to the extent of peace, he had given the first push to the article in the *Mezzogiorno*—a miscalculation on his part, he could now see clearly. Notwithstanding the Court's decision, Donna Emilia was still on the warpath against him, and more furious than before. He had dismissed that move therefore from his mind, rubbing his hands instead over the private investigations of Don Michele, and savoring in anticipation the fine surprise that clever sleuth was quietly preparing for Donna Emilia. Don Michele was more than willing to bring a good solid indictment against Donna Emilia and her cook; but the Commendatore, in full accord with Alamanni, counseled discretion and prudence. The three had finally agreed that Don Michele should keep an eye on Gaetano, in such a way that, when the Prosecutor

came to question him, he would tell the same story he had confided to Don Michele, produce Marietta's letter, and accuse his mistress of conspiring with him. Gaetano's testimony and Marietta's letter would be enough to turn the whole proceedings upside down, rescue Marietta, and leave Donna Emilia in such serious trouble that for a time at least she would have something else to think about than molesting honest people.

What therefore Alamanni was proud of was his discovery—to him it seemed a real discovery—of Marietta's innocence, and without losing a second's time he had proceeded to "straighten things out" in those places where he thought things needed straightening—in those "higher circles," that is, in those palaces, one, two, or three, in which—in his eyes at least—the Secret of Power became visible and tangible to a very small number of the very elect. So pleased was he indeed, that he resigned himself to letting Donna Edvige run about, begging, pressing, even climbing the stairs of one ministry after another to obtain permission for Susanna to be brought to Rome. Another of her usual "exaggerations," and just a wee little bit imprudent . . . but after all, not so crazy, not so likely to attract attention as the trip to Florence—besides he couldn't prevent her, anyway! . . .

In fact, there was just one thorn in the bouquet he could hand himself. That hundred thousand which he had mentioned most imprudently! It was no longer necessary to bribe the lawyer—he had the thing on his own. Yes, that had been a bit too hasty—though, just there and then, that evening in the carriage—well, he was a bit upset at the time—he had not been able to resist. Fortunately . . . between promising and paying, as between saying and doing, there lay an ocean. Who could say that better than Augusto Alamanni?

CHAPTER II

But at this point History must return to a modest person She has been too long neglecting, in the place where She left her last—a place, to tell the truth, where She is sure to find her, since she is there in watchful hands under lock and key: Marietta.

Marietta had now been a prisoner for almost three weeks. It was on the second day that "outside meals" began to come in. It was on the third day that she was moved to a "pay cell"—a little room with an armchair, a table, a bed, a mattress, a pillow, a basin, a short fat candle, a hat-brush, a tooth-brush, a piece of soap, two combs, some lingerie, a dress, a blanket, and a flower vase with four carnations in it. Had she been transported to the Quirinal she would not have been more surprised, more dazzled, by its splendors than by that rudimentary luxury, with which the mysterious wand of an unknown magician (or rather of two, for a part of these wonders had been sent by Donna Edvige) had suddenly reclothed the soul-chilling bareness of the jail. Then and there after those three days of horror she suddenly came to herself again, drew a deep breath of pure air, felt herself half free indeed, because now she could really wash, really comb her hair, sit on a chair that was a chair, and enjoy the red of the four carnations (Accolti's gift) which shone like rubies against the whitewashed wall of the cell. And the sun seemed to be there on call for her, because in the evening she could light that short, fat candle. One object, however, was lacking, and there had been no way to soften the iron entrails of the "Rules": they proscribed mirrors. It was a deprivation she felt: every once in a while, in making her toilet, she would look around unconsciously expecting to find one on the wall. Nor did she have to sit all day with folded hands. She asked and obtained permission to assist in mending the prison linen and the clothes of prisoners. Every morning a sister brought

her, along with the necessary implements, a basket of miserable rags on which she would bestow the extreme unction of a pious needle. Every evening the sister took them away again. With good food and a little work to keep her busy, surrounded by a trace of comfort, a shadow of luxury, Marietta adapted herself, as do all prisoners sooner or later, to the slow passing of time, the loneliness, the ennui, the silence, the uncertainty of the future, growing dull of mind, torpid, vegetable-like, half becoming a tree that lives for the sake of living, always in the same place.

She kept expecting a new examination every day, and she would think out in detail what she would say to the judge. Sometimes she would grow impatient at the long waiting in vain, and fear lest she be forgotten in that prison-hole—but it was always with some sort of resignation, even if she were no longer cheerily to repeat the favorite refrain that had become habitual with her: "It is Fate!"

The sisters and the matron told her often enough, with goodnatured smiles, that the Law is never in a hurry. They were kind to her, and favored her as much as they could, often exchanging a few words with her. And that was a consolation, though sometimes she found certain questions and certain remarks of the matron rather strange. The woman wanted to know where she lived and where she worked, before her arrest. And she kept repeating a question: Did Marietta really have no friends—men or women—in Rome? And she pressed the inquiry as to a sweetheart. One day when Marietta had spoken of Accolti and of his kindness to her, the matron asked where he lived.

"Do tell! Do tell!" she exclaimed. "Why, I live just next door in the Via . . ."

But Marietta could not imagine why the matron had seen fit to confide her own address nor why, after so confiding it, she had stopped there, like a person expecting

something that refused to come. Finally the woman had gone out, thinking probably:

"Either the girl is as stupid as an owl or shrewder than the Devil!"

But that Friday, the fifteenth of February, on the stroke of twelve exactly, the matron came hurrying to Marietta's cell followed by a sister.

"Hurry, hurry!" she cried. "They are waiting for you! And you are really in luck: you have struck the best-natured one of them all."

The matron was wont to dispense that same remark to all the prisoners in the "pay cells." It cheered them up, she said, and did no harm to any one.

"Really? Really?" exclaimed Marietta, jumping to her feet in surprise at a summons which she had been expecting for so many days, and which she had often feared would never come. Hastily she glanced at her skirt and shoes, raised her hands to her head, smoothing her hair, once more turned to the wall, for a swift glance at the mirror she should have known was not there.

But the matron was impatient.

"Come, come! You're wasting time. . . ."

Such encouragement proved stronger than Marietta's desire to appear at her best before the Law. After another hasty play of her fingers over hair and clothes, without being able to imagine how she looked, nor to remember a single one of the many things she had prepared over those three long weeks to say in her own defense, confused, impatient, anxious, she followed the sister through rooms and corridors and up and down stairs; and shortly found herself in the presence of Justice. The moment she had awaited with such impatience, when Truth would justify her apothegm and come to the top like oil, was upon her!

But at first Marietta was surprised and even a little disappointed at finding herself in a dark, bare, insignificant room, in the presence of two men, each with a little

table in front of him. Both had their coats and hats on, and seemed more interested in keeping warm than in anything else. The prosecuting Judge was the one at the larger table, under the big black-framed portrait of the King, which hung from a nail on the wall—Marietta guessed this much at once. But she could hardly believe her eyes: he was a young man, to go on appearances, thirty-five, maybe forty, clean-shaven, lean, with dark hair and a dark complexion with a greenish glint, a long, lanky neck meandering about in a loose collar.

Marietta had scant acquaintance with History and with Poetry. Her conception of a minister of the Law came from the illustrations in a French novel dealing with a sixteenth century subject, which had belonged to her first mistress. The girl could not be expected to know that the Justice which, shrinking from the sunlight, had come almost stealthily to question her in that gloomy jail, was that particular brand of human Justice which does of course desire to get the truth, and will go to some pains to get it, and does not enjoy being tricked, is in fact not averse to being regarded as infallible. But it was also that breed of human Justice which to win fear and reverence from men and to be understood of men, assumes a human body and a human brain, and therefore does not live on air alone, but needs bread and butter, and even jam, and hates, loves and fears, and sometimes (he that is without sin . . .) likes to take things easily! A Justice therefore which cannot seek the truth beyond certain limits and boundaries fixed by the wills of many masters whom She is obliged to serve—among them men of power who feed and clothe Her, the imperious will of Everybody-Nobody which all men rightly fear, though no one knows just what it is nor where it resides: certain rules which She has made for Herself, partly to keep from losing Her head amid the unchained passions of the world, partly to be able to cut the tangles tied by human malice, without racking Her brains in untangling them,

and in such a way that the offhand judgment of the majority will catch Her idea and not suspect Her of partiality. An imposing old man with a white beard on his chest, a black toga with gold tassels on his shoulders, and a doctor's cap on his head, "presiding over a session"—so had the unlettered Marietta pictured the person of Justice; and not as a man who lived in a garret and kept his coat on when he was cold, wore a felt hat like Gaetano on Sundays, and was a youngster to boot.

But the Judge motioned her to a chair in front of him. His questions were in a friendly tone: how about Gaetano? Were they friends? and how long had she known him? And he encouraged her every now and then with a kindly nod or with an "I see!" or an "All right!"

She took heart.

Her account was not all it might have been, because she would remember snatches of the fine speeches she had prepared during the long wait, and would use them by fits and starts, but not always in the necessary sequence. She had known Gaetano for some time. They became engaged before the death of Signor Cavalieri. They had been waiting to be married till her mistress's trial was over. They saw each other every Sunday and sometimes even during the week.

But little by little as she approached the rough going—all that business about the four thousand lire—she began to hesitate, spoke more slowly and even stammered a little. It pained her to hear her own voice repeating Gaetano's suspicions of her mistress and the ugly suggestions he had made. It was as if to have listened to them were a disgrace in itself. In this embarrassment she fell silent. The Judge had not taken his eyes from her. He now encouraged her again in a tone paternally severe:

"Go right on, right on! I am here on purpose to get your side of the case."

Marietta hesitated a moment longer, and then made up her mind. It was reverence for the Truth, fear of falsehood in the presence of the Law as in the presence of

God, a conviction that no reticence or deception could mislead it.

"Why, I thought . . ." she began, "I thought Gaetano was a good boy. If I hadn't, I would never have agreed to marry him. Instead he has very bad judgment, and there were people to egg him on . . ."

Well started with this preamble, she went forward as best she could, blushing, incoherent, unwilling to tell how Gaetano had got it into his head that Lieutenant Alamanni was her mistress's lover and that she, Marietta, knew it.

But on hearing his name, the Judge knit his brows: "Lieutenant Alamanni? The Senator's son?"

Marietta was not so learned in constitutional law as to know exactly what a Senator was. She replied haltingly:

"Senator?—I don't know . . . I know his father is the richest man in Rome. Gaetano says he earns a million a day . . ."

"I see. . . . Go on!" said the Judge, smiling.

With the same effort, the same sense of shame, as though forcing herself to confess a sin, Marietta told how Gaetano had pestered her, that Sunday, to use that imaginary secret to get money from Lieutenant Alamanni, and how they had quarreled because she had refused.

That was the worst point. Once over it, she advanced more light of foot, telling how, in sorrow at her broken engagement, she had thought of ways of getting the money, how she had finally thought of asking Accolti to lend her four thousand lire; how the latter in his turn had begged the loan of Oliviero Alamanni; and how Alamanni had made her a present of it. There had never been any talk between her and Gaetano of any testimony, either false or true—that she would swear on her mother's head! And when she had finished and given her oath, she fell silent again, much relieved, confident that she had won her cause, waiting for the Judge to say that he was glad to have learned how it was and to open the prison doors

for her to leave. Had she not told the Truth? Was not Truth like oil . . . ?

But the Judge sat thinking for a moment. Then he picked up a pencil from the table, looked over a number of papers, pencil in hand, made a note here and there. Then he looked up at Marietta again, laid down the pencil, and asked her why, instead of telling that long story to the police, she had said the money was her savings.

That lie was the one spot on Marietta's conscience. To hear herself reminded of it in that way sent the blood rushing to her face. She could only ask forgiveness. Yes, she had lied, and that was a wrong thing to do; but it was Gaetano's fault. While they were waiting for the examination, he had ordered her to answer in that way.

Another question: how did she explain the fact that Donzetti, her fiancé, had accused her?

Just because she was innocent, Marietta could not explain it. She stammered, confused:

"I don't know. I guess it was Martina, Signora Cavalieri's maid. She must have put him up to it . . . That woman is slyer in her sleep than we are when we're awake."

But at that point the Judge began to harry her with questions. When, where, how, and how long, had she known Count Accolti and Lieutenant Alamanni? How old was Lieutenant Alamanni? What was his business? Was he an officer in the cavalry? Did he see her mistress often? What had been the relations between them? Why had she asked Count Accolti for the money, and not Lieutenant Alamanni, as her fiancé had suggested? Why did Alamanni give the money, and not Accolti? She had asked for a loan. Why had the money been given as a present? Was it really a present? Did she mean to say the money had come, offered, just like that, without being asked for twice—and as a reward for her loyalty to a third person?

Marietta was surprised and not a little befuddled by the rain of questions; but she tried to answer each as best she could, though wondering all the while, a little anxiously, whether that Judge too were not an enemy.

But when the man came to the subject of Oliviero's generosity, the questions came so thick and fast and they were so insidious, so searching, so strange, that at last she lost her bearings and stammered that she did not understand.

"You don't understand? Let me speak plainly, then!" said the Judge. "Have you been this man's mistress?"

"Who, me?" screamed Marietta beside herself, her face flaming. "Why, I have hardly spoken to him twice, or perhaps three times, in my whole life."

"Two or three times in your whole life! And he makes you a present of four thousand lire, tosses them at you without your even asking! . . . Look here, young lady! What do you take me for?"

"But it's the truth, Your Honor, the truth! May Santa Lucia strike me blind if it is not the truth! I swear it's true!"

"Now let's not worry Santa Lucia with all this, and don't do any swearing." The Judge's tone was harsh now. "The Law is the Law; and I must warn you that any one who thinks he can get away with lying, thinks so at his own risk and peril. You heard what I said. I repeat it: not even a Rothschild would give a woman a present of a sum of money of that size without a good reason. If the reason is not the one I suggested, there may be another! Let's have it—because you know what it is! But if you keep on trying to make me believe those four thousand lire fell out of the sky into your lap, why—I can only come to one conclusion: you have been Lieutenant Alamanni's mistress."

But the truth Marietta had told, the whole truth; so that, on hearing it still demanded of her in that harsh and ugly tone, words failed her completely and she burst into tears as she had done at Headquarters.

But the Judge did not fly into a passion, like the Inspector, and he did not abuse her. He sat watching her in silence, letting her have her cry, waiting imperturbably for the tempest to pass.

A shrewd and intelligent Calabrian was this young jurist, upright and devoted to duty. To be a good judge he sat up nights over his briefs and papers. But he was not a father-confessor to crawl under the skin and enter the soul of his patient. He was a servant of Justice, in the latter's human form, where She takes on body and speech to make Herself understood and feared of men. By duty and function therefore, he was obliged to seek, with the rather coarse weapons of his office, a truth of a certain rough-and-ready plausibility capable of winning general understanding and acceptance and of satisfying those invisible masters whose eyes he always felt upon him. "A well-balanced head!" his superiors noted of him in their character reports. "The Prosecutor-General likes me, I can't imagine why," the young jurist would himself say with a complacency that strove to be laudably modest. But his superiors would have hastened to modify the praise and the Prosecutor-General, instead of liking him, would have referred him to an alienist had he begun to split hairs over Gaetano's accusation, wondering, for example, whether it were plausible that Marietta would be fabricating evidence in a case in which the Defense alleged no crime had been committed. The dutiful servant of the Law knew that the invisible Powers all wanted Marietta guilty, because circumstances, presumptions, to say nothing of the actual testimony, all spoke against her as clearly as human Justice could possibly ask. When standing in agreement with enacted Law, with the principles of jurisprudence, and with the Prosecutor-General, the young judge could be sure he was not making a mistake. It did not even occur to him therefore that Gaetano had not accused Marietta justly.

But with Gaetano's lie accepted as truth, poor Marietta could defend herself to the last ditch with the desperate argument of innocence and the extreme recourse of tears: the true truth she was telling stood convicted of falsehood by the judiciary truth which fiscal Logic constructed by rule of thumb. An effort at blackmail on

Gaetano's part was an evident invention. Would such a man ever dream of speculating on an alleged adultery, fabricated by himself out of thin air, without a word from his fiancée on the subject? Was it plausible that Marietta would request a loan for herself and her future husband of a man she scarcely knew; that this man would then turn to another, who had no interest in the world in the two fiancés, but who, nevertheless, straightway loosens his purse-strings, oversteps the modest request for a loan, and gives the money as a present?

All that Marietta had said seemed to the Judge to clear the basic mystery in the case—the source of the money; but her explanation that it was a gift did not hold water —it was an invention designed to hide the very thing the Law wanted to know and had to discover. Following that clew, the moment the Judge learned that the money came from a young and wealthy cavalry officer, he began hammering at the relations between Marietta and Alamanni, scowling, frowning, pulling a long face, even pretending—it was a pretense, for he judged Marietta a girl of good character—that she was the lieutenant's mistress, in the hope that her resentment at the insult would force her to drop some hint of the truth.

When he noticed that the sobs were coming less violently, he changed his manner, and gently, kindly, with almost fatherly interest, he asked:

"Why are you crying? You are afraid of me? I am here not to harm you but to get your story impartially, as a father would . . . I will also tell you that you seem to me a good girl. It is hard for me to believe you have done what they say you have done. I would like nothing better than to send you home this very evening. But you must help me. You must tell the truth. Otherwise I cannot be sure you are innocent, no matter how much I should like to think so. And this blessed truth you have not given me yet—why, I don't know, perhaps in fear of hurting somebody who has been good to you. A laudable sentiment, I don't deny that; but don't go and get yourself

into trouble to spare some one else! I believe you: you have never been Lieutenant Alamanni's mistress. Well then, I ask you once more: why did he make you a present of that money? There must have been a reason. May it have been, let us suppose, from some interest on his part in your mistress?"

"But that's just what that foolish Gaetano got into his head!" replied Marietta, resolutely, looking up at him.

"And that's what I've got into my head, perhaps because I'm another fool!" And the Judge smiled. "May not Gaetano have been pretty close to the truth?"

"Oh, Gaetano talks . . . just to hear himself talk! . . ." retorted Marietta more resolute, more decided, than ever. "My mistress is a good woman."

From the aggressive firmness with which Marietta denied, the Judge could see that his fiscal dialectic would prove helpless before a loyalty so stubborn. Instead of making a rebuttal he knew would be vain, he rested an elbow on the table, his chin in his hand, closed his eyes and sat thinking, while Marietta gazed anxiously at his dark face with the greenish glint, wondering what he intended to do next. She had not lost hope that the Judge would set her free that day: she was innocent; she had told the truth; Truth is like oil! . . . In point of fact at just that moment the Judge was making up his mind that she was guilty, and by simple virtue of her vehement denial.

Gaetano's accusation stood—the Law, as Law, could not doubt that it was true. Now it had come out that Lieutenant Alamanni gave the money. The tangle cleared in the twinkling of an eye, if one supplied that the Lieutenant had been Susanna's lover. Taking Alamanni as Susanna's lover—so fiscal Logic went on to complete its structure—a maid so loyal could not but be party to the secret; and knowing it, it was reasonable to argue that she had confided it to the man she intended to marry. Nothing to be wondered at, therefore, if the two fiancés put their heads together to exploit the secret at the ex-

pense of Oliviero and of Accolti. Needing money to get married, Marietta might easily ask Accolti; and Accolti, unwilling or unable to hand it over, but also unable to refuse, would naturally turn to Alamanni, who—I should say so! . . .—would not wait to be asked twice. . . .

But now, Alamanni would want something for his money, something two penniless beggars could give—testimony, let us suppose, testimony in line with Susanna's defense. For—plain commonsense!—Marietta would not think of bribing Gaetano on her own initiative: she would have to be put up to that by some one interested in proving useful to Susanna—by an accomplice, a lover, or even a relative. But at this point Marietta and Gaetano must have quarreled. Perhaps Gaetano had drawn back, and Marietta applied the screw—reproaching him for ingratitude toward his benefactor.

Such the possible, the plausible explanation of the story the girl had told, false on the whole, but true in many particulars, ingeniously put together to save Alamanni and herself without bearing too hard on Gaetano! On the assumption that Oliviero Alamanni had been Susanna's lover, everything became clear: and since everything had to be clear, Alamanni had been Susanna's lover, that very lover whom the Law had been vainly seeking in the Cavalieri case in order to find a motive for such a mysterious crime. Crossing this bridge of inferences bolted to arches so solidly tied together, that expert jurist was certain he could arrive at a judiciary truth that would hold in any court. Why then try to wring from that hardened little liar a reason for the gift which he could get more directly from Count Accolti and Oliviero Alamanni?

He thought a moment longer; then turning brusquely toward the stenographer, he said:

"The record, please! This will do for today."

The clerk took up the pen, sprung the point on his left thumb-nail, dipped it in the ink, and sat ready for

the dictation. Marietta was gazing at the Judge, dismayed. "This will do for today?!" He had said that? He was going to send her back to prison? He would question her again another day? But what more could she say, when she had told him everything she knew, as sincerely as she would have spoken in the confessional? She looked anxiously at the Judge, waiting for him to explain that phrase so fraught with menace. But the Judge said nothing. He sat motionless, lost in thought. The silence lasted for minutes. Marietta's eyes were glued every second upon him. She was almost fainting from anxiety, from second to second. The clerk for his part was waiting, too, rolling the pen round and round between his fingers, staring at the steel point. And the Judge was thinking, thinking . . .

Intelligent servant of Justice in Her human form, he was aware of Her weaknesses. He was aware that for a century past, Justice, human Justice, had been concerned to appear most impartial, while remaining mighty careful to show due consideration to the people who deserved it; that an investigation which threatened to incriminate a Count Accolti and a Lieutenant Alamanni—and on a body of fact that would connect them with a case as prominent as the Cavalieri case—was a serious matter, and one that must be carefully considered; that in transcribing on the record the truths and the lies told, as he believed, by the prisoner before him, the greatest circumspection had to be used. Count Accolti had been asked for the money. Lieutenant Alamanni had furnished it. On those two facts, he did not hesitate; they should be set down there in black and white, that they might not disappear again. But then there was that long and involved and disconnected story about Gaetano's attempt at blackmail, suggested by the alleged missteps of the Cavalieri woman. Should he put that also in the record—perhaps in a form somewhat abridged?

Suddenly he turned toward the stenographer, and began:

"In the year of our Lord, 1895, this 15th day of February, 12 M., Rome, Prison of the Mantellate:

"Before X—— Y——, Examining Justice of the Royal Criminal Court, District of Rome, assisted by the Vice Chancellor undersigned, appeared one Marietta, daughter of the late Pietro Sorbi, born at Codogno, aged twenty-seven; unmarried; occupation, housemaid; charge: subornation of perjury.

"Questioned, she replied:

" 'I talked with the said Gaetano Donzetti; and as we were to be married shortly, we had planned to set up a little restaurant, situated in the Via Sistina, No. 146. As we needed four thousand lire for the payment down, I thought of asking Count Accolti for that amount. Count Accolti is a relative of my mistress, Susanna Cavalieri, now under arrest at Florence. Count Accolti did not have the money, but he told me he would ask his friend, Lieutenant Alamanni Oliviero, who in fact two days later sent it to me. That was the money I was handing to the man Donzetti, my fiancé, in Piazza Termini, Sunday the 27th of January, when I was arrested.' "

"Question: 'Did you ask or was there any talk of your asking the man Donzetti to give evidence in one sense or another?'

"Answer: 'I have never talked to any one and no one ever talked to me of any evidence that my fiancé would give.'

"Shown the declaration made by her fiancé before Police Inspector, Chevalier X——, deponent replied:

" 'There is no truth in it. With my fiancé I talked of nothing except buying the restaurant.'

"Shown the letter (Exhibit A in the Record, written by her to the man Donzetti), deponent replied:

" 'I recognize it. It is mine.'

"Reread, oath duly taken, and signed . . ."

But when he had finished the dictation and Marietta had signed the brief minutes, the Judge pulled a bell and a sister came running at the call. Marietta had waited

till then, half in fear, to be sure, but also half in hope. Suddenly the four walls of the room began to whirl dizzily before her swimming eyes. She had told the truth, and they were leading her back to prison!

She rose, followed the sister, once more traversed the chain of gloomy rooms and corridors, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, like a deaf person walking in a thick fog; and again in her cell she threw herself on the bed sobbing as if her heart would break.

Justice had encountered Her twin sister, Truth, but She had not recognized Her, nay, She had turned Her back on Her. Truth, instead of coming to the top like oil, had sunk to the bottom like a stone! The sun might go down that evening and never rise again! What hope was left her now? To what saint could she commend herselt, if she had told the truth, and they had not believed her? Condemned, disgraced! She would never get out of prison again! It was better not to think any more, not to suffer any more. It was better to die. . . .

If she only dared!

CHAPTER III

The day after Accolti's return—Saturday, the sixteenth of February—Oliviero went to the garrison, if not reassured, at least fairly serene; and he treated the soldiers almost with his customary courtesy. A healing balm had descended in the night on the flaming scar of the preceding day; and the one who had unwittingly poured it upon his spirit was Accolti, by that revelation of Susanna's secret of secrets. The knowledge of it drove from Oliviero's mind all obsessions as to the injustice of which the poor girl was a victim, the gloating countenances of his enemies, the humiliation of his own discomfiture. As he thought again and again of that strange confidence, it kept coming to

him as a miracle ever new that filled him with an almost voluptuous tenderness, an intoxicating eagerness to kneel in spirit before that purity and adore it with a complete surrender of his whole soul. In that adoration he had grown so fervent that, in the end, after exhausting all other forms of homage which his mind could imagine, he threw himself upon a fancy still more bizarre. Suppose . . . suppose he were to marry Susanna when she came out of prison! And step by step, moving from scene to scene, he traversed in imagination the whole story of a fantastic marriage with the prisoner—the day when, humbly, as if she were a princess, he would sue for the honor of her hand; how he would break the great news to his friends; what gifts, what festive parties would signalize the betrothal; then the wedding—while a world looked on agape. . . .

This strange frenzy served as a soothing distraction during all Friday, so that when he awoke Saturday morning, he quickly recovered it at the point where he had left it to fall asleep the night before. But that afternoon came a long letter from Elena, four pages of effusive tenderness, followed in a manner very natural, very offhand, but also with a prolixity Oliviero judged hardly necessary, by a narrative: the Marquis Spinelli was in Milan—she had met him: Spinelli was helping her disentangle her legal affairs; he was coming to see her every day, was, in fact, proving a semi-Providence for her.

"So he's in Milan!" thought Oliviero. And he recalled that for several days he had not seen his enemy at the garrison.

At first he attached no particular importance to this meeting of his mistress and his rival, dismissing it as one of the many combinations that chance works out every day. Indeed for a time, continuing in his intoxicating daydream of Susanna, he gave no thought whatever to Elena or to Spinelli. When all of a sudden . . .

Oh, Love, Love, how strange and wonderfully fashioned the imbroglios over which thou, divine embroiler, dost pre-

side, stirring tumultuously together all the faculties of the soul—sense, imagination, intelligence, the most diverse and contrary sentiments, piety, cruelty, selfishness, sacrifice, vanity, courage! That obsession with Susanna was love, one of those loves of the imagination, kindled at a distance by a glimpse of some far-away, inaccessible beauty, to which sentimental adolescents not infrequently succumb. Such passions, feverish effervescences fanned by distance and by the strain of eye and ear to see and hear, abate usually as they are born—in the silence of a pleasurable inner torment. And in the silence of such a pleasurable torment, one of those strange distant loves was rising in Oliviero's heart from admiration and worship of that purity unknown to the world; but it was rising, like a little shrub at the foot of a full-grown tree, in the shade of a maturer passion of sense and touch—his love for Elena. Without knowing it Oliviero was enamoured of two women at the same time, but in different ways. The fact, accordingly, that an amorous frenzy in him was crowning Susanna with orange blossoms did not prevent a terrible thought from bursting upon him like a thunderbolt. Elena was a widow! Elena could not wear mourning all her life just to do him a favor! Elena would want and was entitled to a family of her own! Spinelli had gone to Milan to ask for her hand.

Jealousy is like a tide, controlled by moons even more capricious than those which wax and wane each month before the eyes of men. At times it falls, falls, falls, receding so far it would seem unable ever to come back again; when, lo, all of a sudden, for a mere nothing, there it is rising, swelling, foaming, dashing upon one in a surge that sweeps every other thought and emotion before it. Oliviero's first wave of jealousy at thought of Elena's freedom had quickly curled inward upon itself, retiring beyond reach of the eye, till it seemed it would never come back again; yet there it was again, catching him off guard, tumbling upon his spirit more voluminous and impetuous than at first, and submerging, for a time at

least, not only the daydream of Susanna, but the other torments of spirit which that dream had allayed.

Vainly did Oliviero strive to dispel this new obsession, now lashing himself to frenzy in the thought of Susanna, now evoking in memory the many proofs of love Elena had given him in the days just past, now marshaling cohorts of the most varied and subtle reasons why he should not be alarmed. If Spinelli were pursuing Elena in Milan, did that not show that she was avoiding him? Had not Elena called Spinelli "an old miser with a turnip in place of a heart"? All by herself in Milan at such a time, Elena would let any one help her who could—Spinelli if there were no one better. Elena was writing to him—if she had planned to betray him, would she not have concealed everything?

But whether he concentrated on Susanna or argued his own jealousy away, his mind would always revert to Elena and Spinelli. He would see them together, at the hotel, on the streets, at the notary's—Spinelli paying court to her, and she enjoying it! And at that point all his arguments would go topsy-turvy. Elena and Spinelli had made a tryst in Milan to be freer, with him far away. Elena's warning against Spinelli was a device to lull suspicion. If Elena still loved him, far from accepting Spinelli's aid, she would not even have received him. Did she not know that Spinelli was his rival and persecutor? This treating him as a friend, on a footing almost of equality, was a betrayal in itself. And then wretchedness, despair, fury—he would hurry to Milan, write to a friend there to set a detective on their trail and get the proofs at once—though if he found them, his despair would be worse, and if he didn't, he would still not be at rest. Jealousy is like that!

One escape from the danger there was and so obvious that every once in a while it occurred to him: to marry her. In that thought, indeed, his innate uprightness was often at grips with his jealousy. How preposterous his demand that Elena should not think of marrying so long

as his whim lasted, and then after that . . . ! But imagine his parents, Accolti, his friends, and especially Susanna, knowing that he was intending to marry Elena! The very idea filled him with an indescribable shame. To marry her would be a sort of treachery, a disloyalty, an act of meanness toward a woman in prison; and ridiculous in the eyes of others. "There is too great difference in our ages," he thought, to explain this feeling in a way not too painful to his pride.

The real truth was that Elena had recovered her liberty both too soon and too late for a marriage with Oliviero—too soon, because she had not yet become a habit, as often happens with illicit relations lasting over long periods of time; too late, because she no longer had the charm of novelty or surprise for him. A wretched day on the whole for Oliviero, that Saturday, though miles and miles removed in nature and occasion from the torment he had experienced two days before on his first clear perception of evil. And Sunday, from the time he awoke, was the same story.

But that morning Oliviero had a call at his house. A sublieutenant in the regiment, who was devoted to Oliviero because a month before the latter had helped him out of a gambling debt, came with an air of mystery and asked him at least three times in roundabout turns of phrase whether he, Oliviero, had noticed anything during the last few days; and then, hesitating, apologizing for the hurt he was obliged to give, the young man told him that at the instigation of the Marquis Spinelli, and on grounds of certain discreditable gossip current about him—some said in connection with Susanna Cavalieri, others in connection with her maid—the junior officers at a meeting held the evening before had decided to "put him in quarantine." In those days when the officers in a regiment made up their minds to force an unpopular comrade to "a change of air," they interned him in an imaginary pesthouse, pledging one another not to speak to him except for the most urgent demands of duty.

"I don't give a damn!" cried Oliviero, shrugging his shoulders.

At first blush, the challenge of his comrades seemed almost welcome. He had never been very talkative about the barracks, and of late, beset by his many thoughts, he had been speaking to hardly any one. This imposed aloofness would relieve him therefore of a burden he had found unpleasant. He said nothing of the matter, not even to his mother—"it was not worth the trouble," he explained to himself; and he thereupon returned all that Sunday to thoughts and torments regarding Elena.

But in the course of the next two days he began to see that the new situation was not so easy to deal with as he had boasted in his first impetuous scorn. Though not greater in length than the silences of the days preceding, this loneliness, because willed by former friends to show that they believed the stories of the Marquis Spinelli, was so much of an ordeal that Oliviero came home from garrison at the limit of his endurance.

Why, why did even his brother officers believe Spinelli, who was slandering him in order to get his mistress? Why did they hate him? What harm had he done to them or to any one else? It was another injustice and a fresh insult from the world, more humiliating than the preceding ones. But if the injustice revolted him, if the insult enraged him, the fact that he could not defend nor exculpate himself, that he stood alone, without shield other than his conscience, in the face of that anonymous, impersonal and undeserved hatred, disheartened him. He was right, he had done no wrong, and he felt the shame almost of a culprit as he reflected that people, and especially his father, must know that he had been ostracized by his brothers-in-arms. It was true, then, that to be right counted for nothing? Whence came this mysterious power of evil to crush him as it had crushed Susanna and Marietta? At times he would feel like rebelling, striking back with both fists, smashing everything within reach. Then again he would feel impelled to flee, disappear, die.

Following on the decision of the Sezione d'Accusa, and on Elena's letter, the ostracism at the garrison had been the third blow within the space of a few days, and no less cruel than the first two; so cruel in fact that after another twenty-four hours, he had confided his trouble to his mother, urging her however not to say anything to his father. The Marquis Spinelli hated him—why he did not know—because . . . well, because . . . They had been friends and at a certain moment . . . Spinelli turns his coat!

Satisfied with the explanation, Donna Edvige sympathized, and urged Oliviero to resist, partly because it was instinct in her not to yield to insolent oppression; partly because she understood that in the circumstances it would have been useless to give contrary advice. But she had watched the boy closely; Oliviero was not very skillful in hiding the clouds that drifted across his spirit, especially from eyes of a mother like that. She read his suffering in his face, and in a sense of her own helplessness turned to her husband, Wednesday morning, to see whether the Senator could think of a way to alleviate the boy's predicament.

The Senator was not disturbed:

"Yes, I know!" he answered quietly.

Surprised that her husband should be taking such a thing so lightly, she nevertheless expressed an idea that had come to her:

"Oliviero is determined to resist, and I understand that. But he is more deeply hurt than you realize. Couldn't you speak to the Colonel and ask him to use his good offices with the men for making peace?"

"Out of the question!" answered the Senator. "Between a regiment that puts an officer in quarantine and the officer unlucky enough to get himself into that fix, the regiment is always right, even when it's wrong."

"But after all, it's sheer malice they are venting on Oliviero, without any responsibility of his."

"It's all due to the court's decision—it has put him

in the wrong. Now all the people Oliviero had been calling dunces and rascals, because they took no stock in Susanna, are getting their revenge. The world is like that. Don't buck the crowd and then be shown up! . . . Add to that the foolish things he has done, such as giving money to a girl for nothing! Finally, there's some one among his comrades who has it in for him . . ."

"But what must Oliviero do, then? After all, he cannot stay in the regiment in defiance of everybody."

"What must he do? Yield, without seeming to. Leave, with a good excuse. I have already made a plan which I count on your good sense not to oppose when I take it up with Oliviero—not telling him that I know about the situation at the garrison, naturally, because I too understand how hard it will be for him . . ."

Senator Alamanni and Castelnuovo came to an instant understanding the moment they met, Alamanni because he saw that Castelnuovo could help him in managing Oliviero: Castelnuovo because he had long been stalking a chance to make himself useful to the fat-pursed banker. The young "King of Rome" had now been coming every other day to report everything he learned in connection with Oliviero and the gossip about him—the big haul of the day before had been the news of the trouble at the barracks and Oliviero's intention of holding on. Knowing the world as he knew it, Alamanni trembled. As between the regiment expelling Oliviero for an imaginary disgrace, and Oliviero expelled unjustly, all those palaces big and little that clustered about the Quirinal, like sheep about the shepherd, would hold right the one who was wrong, and wrong the one who was right. And that summary defenestration would be an indelible smirch. Oliviero would never be able to make sure of the charges and therefore to disprove them. Twenty, thirty, forty years thereafter people would still be whispering that in his youth Oliviero had been driven from the Army for certain reasons which had never come to light, probably because it was much better that they be kept dark! In point of fact, the Senator had

been much more upset than his wife would have supposed, partly on his own account—that "matter" was still pending, and he was now impatient in earnest to be through with it—but even more, unselfishly, on Oliviero's account, as sometimes happened in his feelings for his son, and for his son only. And a thought that had been cropping up in his mind occasionally for several years past, buzzing a little and then fading away, had cropped up and buzzed more loudly than usual . . .

Yes, yes, there was no way out of it: Oliviero must be enticed away, not only from Rome, from the regiment, from all those people with whom he had clashed, but from that pride, that pride, that was leading him astray both by teaching and by example. For pride it was, a satanic pride, and nothing else!

That Alamanni should discover on just that day, and suddenly take to denouncing this particular and very dangerous resemblance of Donna Edvige to Lucifer might seem somewhat singular. And yet—so it was. On that particular day Alamanni was feeling himself angelified by a most exemplary humility as compared with and in contrast to his wife. Oh, to be sure, for years and years he had respected, besides himself, two, three, four people at the most. Even now, when he had softened a little with age and experience, he doffed his cap only to the highest peaks of power, to the real titles, to the glories authenticated by a showy official stamp. And when he wanted to go through with a scheme of his, not the Pope, not the King, not the Emperor, or the three banded in league together, could persuade him to hold off! But that was not pride—why, not at all!—as he saw it: it was an accurate perception of his own merit coupled with a praiseworthy energy in standing up for his own rights.

It was pride on the other hand, just downright, insufferable, mischief-making pride, in his wife, and in the son she had infected with her blood and her influence, this believing yourself the only fair-minded and intelligent person on earth; this pretense of being always right;

this perpetual speaking in the name of Truth and Justice. Susanna might well enough be innocent; but since there was no certain means of proving such a thing, what right had Donna Edvige, what right had Oliviero, to force their opinion down the throats of other people and divide the human race up into lambs and goats according as people swallowed or didn't? What right had they to take on themselves the task of rewarding the lambs just to spite the goats, the goats being in the majority, not to call it unanimous? In Accolti, yes—you could understand it—he was a relative of Susanna. But Donna Edvige and Oliviero had no conceivable excuse or pretext; and the fine consequences of their self-conceit even the blind could see! Mixing in business that was none of his, to reward a virtue he had not been appointed to judge, Oliviero makes a present of money to a girl. And that wooden-headed generosity had drawn down on him so much talk, so much suspicion, that there he was, not only in danger of being chased from the Army, but in serious difficulties with the police—or, at least, he would have been, had it not been his good fortune to have a father whom people respected, an old man with some brains, with the modesty requisite for getting on in life, and with a number of good, dependable friends! With these gifts and resources he had been able to clear up the tangle and procure certain proof of the boy's bad judgment but good faith.

"We've got to get him away from that mother . . . give him a change of air . . . otherwise I'll never have a man of him."

So thought the Senator.

But with this desire to teach Oliviero a lesson in proper modesty by sending him somewhere abroad, there was blended a less Christian and less confessible idea of the Senator's also: to get him away from horses and arms. If Oliviero was, with the exception of Donna Edvige and his father, dead now these many years, the only person Alamanni had ever really loved, and for whom he was capable of a sacrifice, he loved him nevertheless in his own way—

not the way the mother loved him—as the continuator of his ambitions beyond the tomb, as a reason for asking something more still of the world even after death. Of this attitude he was becoming more conscious himself as the years went by. The nearer he drew to the end of the road (he was now past sixty), the surer he yearned to be that Oliviero would continue his work and improve on it. So love and ambition were inextricably entangled in his soul, each intensifying the other. From the very first he had been hoping for a chance to get Oliviero off that side-track, the Army, to which he had taken so much against his father's will, and give him his start along the main line of his destiny—"big business." Why, the boy was twenty-two, high time for him to be settling down in earnest!

That was why Alamanni had not taken the ostracism at the barracks as an unmixed evil. He even wondered whether it might not prove to be Fortune in disguise of Misfortune, as Fortune often comes, offering a good pretext for a first withdrawal from the garrison which would seem easier because temporary, but which could then gradually and imperceptibly be made final, especially if Oliviero should fall in with the new kind of life.

But the Senator knew Oliviero well enough now to see that, unfortunately, he was much more like his mother than like his father. If he were to take him by the horns, he would cry out that such a withdrawal would be a flight, an admission of guilt, insist that being innocent he had the right and the duty to remain—and other lunacies of the sort.

Thinking, thinking, with an imagination always fertile in expedient, the Senator hit on a way of separating Oliviero from his uniform without seeming to force the withdrawal upon him. In those very days the Geographical Society, of which Alamanni was patron, trustee, director, was considering the project of sending Captain Bóttego on that famous exploring expedition in Somaliland where he was to find glory and death. Bóttego was to be ac-

companied as far as Lugh by a delegation of commerce and trade. Alamanni had already decided to have a personal representation on the commission and had thought of suggesting to Oliviero that he go with that agent. At Lugh he could do a little hunting, get a first-hand view of the country and its resources. Returning to the coast, he could go on to India, China, Japan, and come back by way of San Francisco-New York. If Oliviero got interested in the traveling idea, they would at once secure leave of absence for him on the plea of preparation for the trip around the world. The dangerous contact between him and the regiment would end at once and with an ironclad excuse—not even café gossip would ever find a hole in it.

"But will Oliviero do it?" objected the mother, when her husband had unfolded his plan. The idea of sending Oliviero to Africa as a member of a trade commission had seemed to her somewhat strange, though travel in itself had struck her as perhaps a happy inspiration.

"And there's Marietta's case! . . ." she added quickly.

"Between now and autumn that knot will be unsnarled too. But for the very reason that Oliviero will probably raise many objections, I am counting on you. Notice, I'm not asking you to help me persuade him—I shall be satisfied if you do not fight me . . . Can I rely on that?"

That afternoon the Commendatore came to tell Alamanni that Marietta had had a heart-to-heart talk with the prosecuting magistrate. The latter was not convinced by her story, and was inclined to think Oliviero had really been Susanna's lover; that Marietta and her fiancé were probably trying to blackmail him; that Oliviero and Accolti had in the end consented to shell out, but on condition that Gaetano give certain testimony at the trial.

"But that's just a fairy-story!" cried Alamanni. "What kind of a mud-pie is your Judge trying to sell me now?"

For when the Senator's own interests were involved, he was not so ready to admit the existence of two truths. Knowing, however, that Gaetano and Don Michele would

open the Judge's eyes at the proper time, he was not disturbed; and that evening, after dinner, while coffee was being served in the little drawing-room, he made his proposal to Oliviero, but less with the idea of persuading him immediately (of that happy result he despaired) than of sounding him out, of discovering whether there were anything else to keep him in Rome even at the risk of open battle with the regiment—some reason other than his Quixotic intractability on the subject of Susanna's innocence, real or supposed.

In reporting the affair at the garrison, Castelnuovo had cautiously refrained from mentioning names, the name particularly of the instigator of the whole trouble. But the Senator remembered his talk with Oliviero, and asked whether Spinelli were not at the bottom of it, and what motive the Marquis might have for such implacable hatred. Castelnuovo then confided that friends of the two boys suspected jealousy in connection with the Countess Asterio.

"What kind of jealousy?" asked Alamanni. "Jealousy of two aspirants, jealousy of one aspirant and one possessor, jealousy of two possessors?"

Castelnuovo shrugged his shoulders. Spinelli was certainly an aspirant, but whether actually, and to what extent, Oliviero and the Countess had come to an understanding, remained a mystery.

So the Senator's object that evening was to learn whether ties of love and jealousy were holding Oliviero to Rome.

"Today," he began, "at the Geographical Society we voted to support that African expedition I told you about. The King is giving forty thousand himself. One of these days I'll invite Captain Bóttego, Senator Bodio, General Dal Verme and a few other members of the Society's committee to dinner here. I'd like to have Oliviero meet the Captain."

"I should be delighted!" Oliviero replied. "I've been

wanting to for a long time. They say he's so intelligent and so likable."

"Now there's a man!" resumed the Senator. "He's worked out a plan that's a marvel. From the coast of Benadir to Lugh, from Lugh to the valley of the lower Om; then up along the western watershed to the great Ethiopian tableland, and across the upper courses of the tributaries of the right bank of the White Nile into the unknown kingdom of Uad-el-Guri. There the gold mines are . . . He hopes, on the way, to find out what became of poor Ruspoli, and perhaps bring his body home . . ."

"If I were a man of Oliviero's age," exclaimed Donna Edvige, "I would try to enroll in the expedition!"

"Oh, the mere mention of Africa always sets your mother off!" said Alamanni, smiling as he turned toward his son. "But you sit there as cold as a block of ice. Shall we conclude you are not your mother's son, in this at least? I should be sorry, because . . . well, because . . . Look! Oliviero . . . let me tell you . . . A commercial delegation is leaving with Bóttego. They stop at Lugh and establish a trading station there. Lugh is, by way of saying, the capital of Somaliland. Now one of my confidential agents will be with the commission as far as Lugh. What would you say to going with this man of mine? After all, sooner or later you've got to make up your mind to look around the world a bit, take a real trip. It occurred to me that Benadir and Lugh might be capital stopping places for the first voyage. You go to Lugh, you stay a month or two seeing the country, hunting (plenty of big game down there), get some notion of business and trade. Then back to the coast—and you come home by way of India, China, Japan, the United States. How does it strike you? I warn you, however, the expedition starts this fall. You'll have just about time to get ready. If you accept, you should apply for leave of absence from the Army tomorrow."

After three days of "quarantine," Oliviero was already so weary of the duty bearing upon him to resist single-

handed and alone in the pure consciousness of innocence the anonymous malevolence of the multitude, that that evening in his secret thoughts he had almost been praying for a providential stroke of illness that would spare him a return to the garrison the next day. At first blush the idea of going to Africa with a commission of business men struck him as it had struck his mother, as a little strange. But the notion of an immediate leave of absence gave him that sense of relief that comes to every tortured spirit with the vaguest allusion to some end of its torment. And yet, according to his father, in six months he would have to leave for Africa, and for a long, long absence. What about Elena? Could he leave her in Rome, six months hence, just when Spinelli would be pursuing her most vigorously? Caught between that first sense of liberation and the pain of this thought, he hesitated.

His mother broke the silence:

"What do you think of the plan, Oliviero?"

In the question Oliviero sensed a tacit encouragement to answer "yes," a delicate expression of the thought that had been in his own mind:

"Would not this be a good way out of the imbroglio at the regiment?"

But Elena stood there vivid before his mind. He had to reply, however. He struggled for an answer that would be enough and yet at the same time nothing:

"Yes, I too should like nothing better than some real traveling . . . Benadir, Somaliland . . . But to leave the service just now . . . I think I ought to go as far as captain, at least!"

"Oh, it's not a question of leaving the service," objected the Senator. "When you return, you can go back to the Army if you choose."

"But to begin my apprenticeship in business at Lugh, among black-skinned savages on the banks of that river . . . what did you call it?"

"Yes, but there's hunting and exploring—excitement aplenty! That will help to lighten your apprenticeship.

Besides you ought to learn pretty soon what routine means."

"Of course I couldn't leave Italy till the two trials are over . . ."

Oliviero was fencing against a definite compromise.

"Oh, there's time, there's time! As I said: the expedition does not leave until fall . . ."

But at just that point, Accolti, taller and leaner than ever in a frayed dinner coat too short and too tight for him, strode into the room:

"Senator, I need you! . . . If things go on this way, I shall be turning Turk!"

CHAPTER IV

After the decision, Accolti had returned to Rome, to his office, to his books, to the resignations and abnegations of his everyday life. Many times in his defenses of Truth and Justice, just when he thought that he held victory in his hand, he had found himself routed by some unforeseen move of a shrewder adversary. But he was the eternal novice of life, so proof against evil that, grasping it theoretically, he never could assimilate it from experience —not even that infinitely tiny grain of it that Honesty must imbibe homeopathically if She is to defend Herself against Rascality on fairly equal terms. He never learned anything even in that school of solid blows that so soon brings wisdom to the majority of people. He entered each new battle as unripe and as unarmed as he had entered his first. He always nourished the same illusions, always made the same mistakes; and when defeat overtook him, always manifested the same surprise. No, Justice and Truth were not dead, because he had not succeeded in defending them with the shrewdness of your consummate rogue. Truth and Justice were things divine: well or ill

defended, they must triumph. And if they were beaten nevertheless, he thought it must be because some devil had scrambled the book of things . . . That book the poor saint unhaloed could no longer read at all. Each new defeat gave one more tear at the rent that was slowly but daily severing him from life. Each new defeat rekindled in acute pangs in his heart a latent desire to cease living:—the one escape from sorrow of the unbelieving saint, as incapable of revenging himself on men as he is of finding refuge in God.

But this time his bitter stupor, his silent anguish, his longing for Nirvana, were greater than usual. Accolti felt his whole family persecuted in the person of Susanna. He had returned to Rome, certain from what he had seen with his own eyes and from what he had learned from the physicians that Susanna would die in prison before her case was called: and the knowledge was a gangrenous sore in his wounded soul. The last woman in his family, dying at the age of twenty in a prison, pure, immaculate, innocent, with the aversion aroused by an imaginary crime to cement the slab over her tomb. . . . This inhuman persecution was an outrage to his father and to his whole family; and it was robbing him of the supreme consolation, the bitter sweetness, of vanishing serenely from the midst of the rustling, bustling climbers that were flocking to Rome from North, South, East and West; from the midst of those unenviable and perhaps unstable fortunes of the upstarts which, like the pasteboard structures of the Third Rome, were rising on every hand.

Without long confidences, simply by reading each other's thoughts, Accolti and Donna Edvige had at once understood and joined each other in this new and common tribulation. With an ardor which the silent anger of that upright soul, so hurt by the evil of the world, made stern and resolute—a sort of angelic reprisal upon men and the times—Donna Edvige had helped and she was still helping Accolti to obtain Susanna's "transfer" to Rome. There had been difficulties, as she had foreseen. The ju-

dicial authorities were not anxious to assume responsibilities, and would do nothing except with backing from Rome. Rome, as usual, would have her deferences, her prayers, her supplications on bended knee. Exasperated one day at this craven obstructiveness, Accolti had almost spoiled everything by losing his temper. But Donna Edvige was there at his elbow, and more mistress of her nerves, had managed to restrain him. Sometimes she even ventured in his stead into the labyrinths of State. She had now offered to go to the Keeper of the Seals, when the decision had been referred from one office to another and finally to the Grand Executor of the Realm. But this time Accolti had rebelled. She must not do such a thing! He would go himself. And that day he had taken the decisive step with His Excellency.

His Excellency, at first, had refused point-blank, whereupon Accolti had asked him whether he were Chief Executive or Chief Executioner in his department. The Minister took offense: Accolti raised his voice:—the prosecution of Susanna was a massacre of innocents and an outrage upon his family. If the Government recognized the services of his father and his own twenty years of hard work by denying him that act of justice, he would return his father's decoration to the King, and resign himself.

The Minister was an honest man, always ready and gladly ready—when he could, with due regard for ordinary prudence—to see right where right was and to show the requisite consideration for people who deserved it. Protesting that he admired, he venerated, he adored, the magistracy of which he was most unworthy Chief, that he was touched to daily tears by the virtues of that most eminent body—no one knew it better than he!—he nevertheless found a way at last to reconcile the honesty of the magistrate with the perspicacity of the man of power. He consented—but on two conditions: three physicians designated by the Ministry must make affidavit that Susanna was really in a serious condition; and Accolti would have to guarantee him the approval of the *Mezzogiorno*.

Vainly did Accolti cite his quarrel with the Comte de Barge. His Excellency stood adamant. Otherwise that vulgar Clio of the Backyards would cry privilege; public opinion would rare and tear; Parliament would rebel and the Cabinet even might go crash!

"And why not the monarchy?" asked Accolti with grim sarcasm.

"Oh, you are joking," replied the Minister with a sigh. "But you wouldn't if, to your misfortune, you stood in my boots!"

So a mediator was necessary. And Accolti had thought of Alamanni. Everybody in Rome said that Alamanni had liberally watered the *Mezzogiorno* with subsidies during its early days, that he was one of its founders, that every now and then he held the ladder for the Comte de Barge to make some little raid on the well-defended Rock of Fortune without risk of breaking his neck.

But at this suggestion that he use influence with the Comte de Barge, the Senator, who always told the truth, tempered on occasion with a little diplomacy, threw up his hands.

"Who, I? I'm afraid you have been misinformed, Count Accolti. I see the editor of the *Mezzogiorno* perhaps once a year. Oh, I know: they say in Rome that I am one of the proprietors of the paper! But in Rome, they'll be saying some day that I've bought the Cupola of Saint Peter's. I took a few shares years ago, when the thing started . . . kissing the money good-by. And good-by it was," he added, smiling. "If a man has money to throw away, I'd advise him to take on a newspaper. But for my part, I haven't any money to throw away . . ."

"Those newspapermen, however! . . ." protested Oliviero.

"Bigger than the King, bigger than the Pope!" said Accolti. "They are our present-day Barons of Twaddle. They make kings and nations tremble in our times the way the feudal barons scared emperors in the Middle Ages. The one thing they are afraid of themselves is

money. That's why I'm appealing to you, Senator . . ."

Senator Alamanni knew that it would be easier to obtain the favor asked from the newspaper than to refuse it to Donna Edvige. Nevertheless, he held off for a good half-hour, partly because he never liked to reveal the hidden processes of his power even to his intimates; partly because he was made that way; and partly because not even with his wife could he restrain himself, when he saw a chance to put a person under obligations to him at no cost to himself. At last, he feigned surrender to the urgent pressure of the family, and like a man willing to bear a cross to be agreeable, he said:

"Well, of course, if you all really insist! To please you, Count . . . to please you, Edvige. . . . I'll see what I can do. I never withhold help in a good cause. . . ."

Before Accolti had time to express his thanks, Donna Edvige turned to him.

"What do you think of the news, Accolti? Just as you were coming in, my husband suggested to Oliviero that he should go with the new Bóttego expedition . . ."

A discussion was at once under way. Alamanni never failed in arguments to prove the usefulness or the necessity of schemes of his. He defended his thesis with his usual vigor.

"Yes, yes, a little training in Africa will do Oliviero good. Why is the Italian aristocracy on the down grade? Because it's getting poorer and poorer. Without big, solid, well-knit fortunes no aristocracy can hold its sway. But in Italy it has become impossible to amass a fortune, and very hard even to keep one. There are too many of us on an old carcass already picked to the bone. Why, it took us two generations to get together the four or five centimes we have. To say nothing of the effort! What a life of drudgery my father led and yours too, my boy, only I know! Real wealth, the wealth that gushes in torrents from a surplus and not just in drops from a dropper —the wealth an aristocracy needs, in other words—can be won now only in new under-populated countries. Look

at the English—they are the great colonizers. They do as I am saying. In Africa there is all the land you want: there are mines, forests, and people, people with faces the color of soot, perhaps, but who at least are not yet reading the socialist newspapers . . ."

"Though once in a while they make a meal of one another!" interjected Accolti. And he added:

"But those four or five centimes you mentioned—they are made, are they not? . . . It might be objected that Oliviero could better spend his time learning how to keep them."

"But the example I set, if you please! That counts for nothing? I am an 'Africanist,' as the socialists say, and I am proud of it. I believe that Italy should conquer and exploit her share of the black continent, as big a share as she can get. But it's not just my idea to sit around in an armchair making speeches and giving advice to others. How do you really feel, Count Accolti?"

Accolti too found the notion of sending Oliviero to Lugh to get his training in business a little strange. But as he was incapable of doubting the good faith of men and the arguments they put forward, he paid attention as earnest to this disingenuous recourse as he would have to a serious reasoning. He grasped the truth there was in it at once, and found a way to express his own opinion without hurting the Senator's feelings. He turned to Oliviero and said jovially:

"Yes, the Moseses of the future are being trained in our banks, and they onward march with a check-book in hand instead of the Tables of the Law. If you feel a modern Moses stirring in you, go to Africa. And let's hope some day a piece of Africa may be called—Alamannia! I wish you such luck," he added with a smile as he rose to take leave, "because in this aged Europe and in this decrepit Italy there is no living any more. Really, Donna Edvige, if it goes on like this, I shall turn Turk, Turk, Turk!"

Alamanni had no reason to be dissatisfied with his

"sounding." Oliviero had not given a decided "no." He could argue, therefore, that the boy was not so strongly attached to Rome that a little pressure might not tear him loose.

And he was not mistaken. That evening, that night, and the next morning, Oliviero thought and thought of his father's proposal, but without talking clearly to himself, trying to deceive himself, as men often do in the conflict of contrary passions. He wanted to go—he did not want to go. The possibility of asking for a leave without seeming to yield to the injunction of his comrades, the relief of not being obliged to go to the garrison any more and face the passive malevolence of the hatreds leagued against him, were such joyous thoughts! But he was in love and he was jealous; and whenever he thought of getting clear so neatly of that difficulty, he would be seized with a very acute pain—the thought that, in going away, he would himself be throwing Elena into Spinelli's arms. Distraught between these two feelings, he would try every now and then to stupefy himself in the mystic intoxication of renunciation, sacrifice, death, oblivion, in which unhappy love sometimes finds stupor only, and sometimes annihilation itself. Elena was a widow. His people would not approve of his marrying her, because she was older than he, because it was not time for him to marry. . . . Should he not give her back her freedom, furnish her with a last and supreme proof of his love by renouncing her for her good, disappearing himself in darkest Africa, like poor Ruspoli, leaving nothing of himself save a vague remembrance of a mysterious end far-off?

When he went to the garrison Wednesday morning, he was half resolved to accept his father's proposal, hoping that that morning he would be facing the ostracism of his brother-officers for the last time. But at home he found a letter, in which Elena let him know that she would be back in Rome that evening, fixed an appointment with him for the next day at the usual place, at the usual hour, and ex-

pressed in affectionate terms her impatience to be with him again. The letter thrilled him and shook his resolve, for that matter a little wavering still. Had his father insisted at that time, he might have extracted the boy's consent.

That day, however, his father did not lunch at home; and Oliviero found himself alone at table with his mother. She did not press the African theme. When the conversation turned on the officers who were boycotting him, the name of the Marquis Spinelli came up. Donna Edvige smiled and said:

"But wouldn't it be funny, if, a year from now, we should have to receive him here with his marchioness? . . . I saw his cousin, the Countess, this morning. . . . She told me that he is serious in his idea of marrying Elena, and that he went to Milan to ask for her hand."

"What a hurry!" remarked Oliviero indifferently. "The Countess Asterio has had barely time yet to buy her weeds!"

But from that moment the mother thought that Oliviero seemed distrait, wandering, half absent from the words he was exchanging with her. That the Marquis Spinelli wanted to marry Elena Oliviero had known for some time and from Elena herself. That he had gone to Milan for that reason and with that intention he had easily guessed. Logically, then, he should not have been upset by the chatter of that cousin of Spinelli's, which told him things long known to him. But love is a strange passion. It is never sure of itself, not even in moments when it believes itself immortal; perhaps because, rising almost always without forethought, inexplicably, and living in the contradictory and the absurd, it is always afraid that it will die in the same way, and as suddenly. That innocent remark dropped by his mother was enough to cause another explosion of his jealousy.

Elena was untrue to him. He would not see her any more. He would challenge Spinelli. He would go to the appointment the next day, yes, but to tell her what he thought of her and then toss her to her paramour—like

a wormeaten fruit. She was a capricious woman, without a heart. Dissolute, besides: who could say how many other men had figured on the list of her conquests, besides the one he knew of? She was going to marry Spinelli because he was a marquis, because he was rich, because he would inherit some day those mines in Mexico—an empty title and a half-dozen bags of gold—and they were worth more than good looks, youth, intelligence, a love passionate, ardent, transcendent, absolute. . . . He was jealous of Spinelli, of Spinelli's title, of the Mexican mines which, not yet Spinelli's exactly, were almost Spinelli's. He was jealous of America and of all the wealth America contained. He wished he were the richest man on earth. He wished he had a title—why didn't his father get to work and secure the blamed thing!

But he wouldn't go to Africa to learn how great fortunes are made, how gold and silver mines are found, that with them the beautiful descendant of a Doge might cease turning up her aristocratic nose. No matter how often and how hard he repeated to himself that his one desire was to tell her what he thought of her and then toss her into the gutter, the rage of jealousy so filled him that he would have faced a hundred ostracisms rather than not stay in Rome and fight for Elena to the bitter end.

That evening his father came home with the order for Susanna's transfer in his pocket, "dragged from the fire with tongs," he said; granted the moment he asked for it, History would say, with many an "Of course, Senator!" "Imagine, Senator!" "Anything we can do for you, Senator!" But when he asked his son what the decision was, Oliviero replied that he did not feel prepared for a journey like the one his father was suggesting; and he held, on that point, so firm that his father, after a show of fight, laid down his arms.

With this problem gone from his mind, Oliviero, loving and hating, dragged his bitter thoughts along until five o'clock on Thursday and his bitter self as far as the

Trinità dei Monti; swearing now that he would greet Elena whip in hand, hoping now to stir her pity by displaying the bleeding stab in his own heart.

But when he saw her enter their sitting-room, smiling, jovial, in a dashing black gown, he relapsed into a sudden sulk as though such good humor on her part were a mockery. How could he hurt her adequately? He made a start by answering her smile and her vivacious greeting with a first rudeness: he did not rise from the sofa where he was sitting, and muttered only a half-audible reply through tight-pressed lips.

Elena stepped to the little center table and began taking off her hat and veil. She had noted the cold reception, however:

"How are you, Oliviero? How have you been?"

"So so . . ." he replied dryly.

"Why . . . what's the matter?" And she withheld the arm that was laying the hat on the table, and looked at him in affectionate alarm.

"The matter? Nothing that would interest you," said Oliviero more rudely, more sulkily. "Let's talk of something else!"

Elena laid the hat on the table, went to the sofa, sat down beside him, took one of his hands in hers, caressing it, and then pleaded in a voice vibrant with love and anxiety:

"No, no! Tell me all about it! What has happened? That matters more to me than anything else in the world. You are annoyed at something?"

And since Oliviero made no answer, and was drawing his imprisoned hand away, she continued:

"Your last letters were so brief! It was easy to see you had something other than your poor Elena on your mind."

"I did not write more because I did not want to disturb you. You were in good company!"

"In good company?" exclaimed Elena, opening her eyes wide in surprise and looking at him.

Oliviero could not contain himself. The accusation was burning his lips:

"You too will admit, however, that it was a very pleasant chance that brought you and the Marquis Spinelli together in a city as big as Milan!"

Elena understood that she had an attack of jealousy to treat, and she flashed from a tender solicitude for her lover's suffering to the voluptuous pin-pricks of amorous jesting that meant the opposite of what they said.

"Chance? Oh, Chance is a rogue, Oliviero, an agreeable little rogue!"

So sang her lips maliciously as she slipped to the floor at his feet, her elbows on his knees, and looked up at him with laughing eyes . . .

"What difference does it make whom I saw at Milan, so long as I have come here for you, all of me, for you only?" said her eyes.

And Oliviero, indeed, understood what they said. But just then he was hating her, and he answered the sweet offering with a bitter, aggressive suspicion:

"But it was not an accident! Spinelli went to Milan because you were there. He went there with a plan of his . . ."

". . . to offer me the mines in Mexico, if only I'll marry him!"

Elena was still laughing, still looking up at him with the same eyes. But this love that spoke in jest by contraries was not for Oliviero in that mood. He pressed his point, short, harsh.

"And you—what answer did you make?"

"My, what curiosity! And how lordly, Mr. Alamanni, today! 'You—what answer did you make? Answer, slave, on your knees!' But suppose I chose not to tell you?" said her lips.

And her eyes: "You know what my answer was—otherwise why am I here?"

But Oliviero, understanding, was out to hurt.

"I know—I know: you accepted!"

He had not yet said a gentle word, he had not yet given her a caress, or a welcome. His words had come more harsh with each reply, a crescendo of rudeness. He had even—it was the gravest offense—taken literally the words in which Love was offering itself, pretending to refuse, in its usual habit of doing everything contrary to good sense. He hated her. He despised her. He was refusing her. Let her go with Spinelli if that was what she wanted! Each reply, each smile, each invitation, angered him the more.

Elena looked at him a moment longer with eyes that still were soft, though the laughing light had died out of them. She rose, left his side and remarked quietly, without anger:

"You are not nice, Oliviero! If there ever was a man who had no reason to be jealous, you are he."

Roused a little by this half-tender observation to change his manner, Oliviero hesitated a second. He could see that in the rush to hurt her he was hurting himself. But the mad, malignant sulkiness was rife within him. Conciliation and resistance alike exasperated him. He struck back harder.

"Me jealous! For your better information—I have never been jealous of any woman."

"Thanks for the compliment!" said Elena quickly, dryly.

"I don't like things that are not clear and aboveboard!" replied Oliviero in his turn, letting go all restraint. "If you want to marry Spinelli, marry him, but tell me so without so much acting!"

He had overshot the mark. The resentments of a love slighted, of caresses spurned, of dignity offended, exploded in one burst.

"You talk that way to me—and I have given you everything, my heart, my honor, my life! This is the love you have for me! I was alone in the world. And I came hurrying to Rome because I thought I had no one left but you. But you I thought I had. . . . However—I know what I have to do. . . . now . . ."

She snatched up her hat, and went to the mirror to put it on. But her revolt and her threat frightened Oliviero. He had been hating. He was loving now. He wanted what he had refused. He knew he had refused it only to have it offered him with more vehement abandon. Terrified rather than repentant, wanting to stop her, but not able to think what he should do or say, he stammered, grasping at random:

"Isn't it true then that you are thinking of marrying Spinelli?"

Elena had answered the question in the inverted language of love. The demand that she confirm it in ordinary words angered her the more. She was looking into the mirror fitting on her hat. She turned upon Oliviero, her hands still holding the brim.

"That is no concern of yours. Have you asked me to marry you? Have I promised to marry you? You are free, why not I? Whatever I may have given you, I have given with no strings attached. But for that very reason I admit no claims on your part upon me. I shall marry whom I please—my coachman—if some day the fancy strikes me! . . ."

And turning again to the friendly mirror, she gave a last rapid touch to her hat, then picked up her coat from the table. But when Oliviero saw her really on the point of leaving, he came to his senses, seized a chair, planted it in front of the outside door and sat down in it, blocking her path.

"Come, Elena, please! Sit down—let's talk things over seriously. So far we have not been normal. It's my fault, I admit. But please don't imitate me! . . ."

And now at last on the wing—Elena was standing in the middle of the room, her back to the center table, listening—he bared his soul before her eyes, relating, exaggerating, all the torments of those days past: the desertion of his comrades, the ostracism at the garrison with Spinelli responsible, the vacation in Africa which his father proposed, the fear that Susanna might die in prison, his

jealousy knowing that Spinelli was in Milan in her constant company. And he implored her forgiveness, falling to his knees and reaching, by way of a conclusion, for her hand. His hatred had gone now, and with it the need of humiliating her. Love was again in possession, and with love the need of humbling himself. But Elena hid her hands behind her back, allowing the lover in disgrace to reach only the hem of her gown with his lips. Calmly, as if she were addressing not a lover in anguish, but a friend in need of counsel:

"Well, I told you myself to keep an eye on Spinelli—that letter, you remember? . . . It's natural your nerves should have been on edge . . . with an imagination like yours . . ."

"You forgive me, then?" implored Oliviero.

"I forgive you, Mr. Nervous, but on condition you don't do it again!"

Elena spoke slowly, rhetorically, in pose of mock solemnity, but glancing sidewise at the clock on the mantel.

"Why, half-past five already! I have an appointment with the dressmaker at six."

"Elena!" cried Oliviero imploring, still on his knees, looking up at her. But she pretended not to understand.

"Well, what is it—what do you want?"

But Oliviero had his arms about her knees and was drawing her to him in a strong embrace, shaking her, beseeching.

"Elena! Elena! Don't punish me that way! You said you had forgiven me. See—I ask your forgiveness once more. Don't be as I was—be kind, as you really are!"

But Elena, held fast in the clasp about her knees, was shaking her head, emphasizing each little negative with a faint, half-sarcastic smile:

"Today, no! Not today!" And she tried to disengage herself. "I came only to see you—see how you were. Let's not forget, either of us: I'm a widow, a very, very recent widow . . . and death is death, even if . . . But, let go of me, let go of me! . . . some other time!"

"When?"

"I don't know—soon, I hope! Give me a chance to pull myself together. I too am not quite normal."

Desperate, Oliviero released her, but cried as he rose:

"You are cruel and heartless! You don't love me. You have never loved me. Even now . . . you are amusing yourself tormenting me . . ."

He was hating again, and with hatred came the need of hurting, even at the risk of hurting himself.

But Elena replied in heat:

"Of course—I'm the tormentor, you the victim! It was I who called liar and traitor!"

"But I was sorry, I asked your forgiveness."

"Yes, when you saw me getting ready to leave . . . That's the way a man loves, insolent, brutal, when he is sure he has you; but quite another tune when the slave rebels and says no! What a fool I was! Not even that wretch of a husband I had ever treated me as you have today."

"Elena! Elena!" cried Oliviero, furious, almost threatening. But it was worse.

"So you are trying to frighten me? I say no! No! I won't, because you have been rude and cross. I won't, because I am not your slave. I won't . . . because I won't! Good-by!"

But Oliviero backed against the door, preventing her passage.

"You won't get out of here, unless first . . ."

He did not finish because his eyes, his face, his attitude threatened clearly enough. But Elena was not ruffled. She sat down in the chair, quietly spread her coat over her knees and said, coldly, just as if her anger had passed:

"Threats? And violence! I'll give you just one minute. If, within the minute, you have not become a gentleman again, you will never set eyes on me again. As for today—please understand! I would much rather leave by that window than by that door."

And she nodded back over her shoulder toward the inner bedroom.

Elena's ultimatum was firm, and Oliviero's threat one of those which possess neither the intention nor the means of execution. Oliviero hesitated a second. He knew he was helpless and therefore a little ridiculous. He went over to the sofa and sat down, confused, ashamed. In her turn, Elena rose, without haste, put on her coat, arranged it carefully in front of the mirror, pulled her veil down over her cheeks, tied it with watchful precaution, and drew on her gloves. Then she went out, without giving Oliviero either a word or a glance. The room might as well have been empty.

"As you wish . . . As you wish. . . . Women? There are all the women in Rome I want, and more beautiful ones too!"

So thought Oliviero after her—the revenge of frustrated sensuality and offended vanity.

At home he dined gayly in a large company, and flirted with a young Countess: he was insulting Elena with that gayety and that dalliance with another woman. But indifference is the most difficult and the most tormenting among the reprisals of love. The moment he had issued from that anesthetizing affectation of frivolity and worldly patter, the moment he found himself alone in his room, he felt the full sting of the wound he had opened in his flesh in humiliating Elena, and he sank to the depths of a desperate, impotent remorse.

Elena had come, tingling with love, more beautiful than usual, her red hair a living flame in the dark of her mourning; and he . . . stolid, brutish, crazy. . . . He blushed for what he had done—every thought seemed sticky with shame. Could he repair the damage, reconquer Elena? And he made plans. He would write her a desperate letter, imploring her to meet him again at the Trinità dei Monti for a final understanding. He would send her a pearl necklace, threaten suicide, do some reckless thing with his horses, get hurt, bring her, tender and repentant, to his

bed of pain. With such ideas he would dally for a moment, then discard them because, possible or impossible, they all had one defect: they required time—and he was in a hurry! A devil's curse was upon him—he could only shoot himself if Elena were not his again the next day. In his fever all her charms would pass one by one before his eyes. At the mere thought that another might appropriate them he felt that he would die. At three o'clock in the morning, unable to sleep, he arose and wrote a long, long letter, confessing his wrong, crying his despair, imploring pardon. The effort relieved him. He grew quieter. But he awoke weary and troubled, after a brief feverish sleep.

The road to the garrison seemed longer, more disagreeable, more painful than ever. He would see Spinelli again—the Marquis had reappeared in Rome the day before. He would find himself among so many disagreeable people, so many disagreeable things, with that thought in his mind—a thought that he would have liked to banish; though to dwell on it and not to dwell on it were equally painful to him.

But on reaching the barracks he found a summons to call on his colonel. The officer received him all honey and smiles.

"Alamanni," he said, "I have news for you. It's a great honor—I am sure it will please you as much as it chagrins me and will chagrin the other officers when they learn of it. It's at Belluno. They have asked for a first-class rider up there—a man with a little gumption about him, to give a spurt to the young officers in that regiment, where riding is a little weak. The Ministry has picked you without saying a word to me. I have a right to feel slighted—but it's all to the good for you. I'm sorry to lose an officer of your ability, but I congratulate you just the same. You will report at Belluno Tuesday. That gives you just time to pack your kit. You are relieved from all duty here immediately."

CHAPTER V

She emerged dripping from the water, stepped over the rim of the tub and, shivering, hurried of movement, took refuge in the great white towel which the old servant was holding out to receive her with opened arms. She allowed herself to be tucked cosily in, squeezed, rubbed, pinched —but rapidly. Then she ran, with the great towel about her, to a couch that stood in the center of her spacious dressing-room; threw herself face down upon it and then, turning a laughing countenance toward the three women who sat at the end of the room, she called:

"Elvira!"

These three laborious mercenaries of the Graces partook every morning of the mysteries of that beauty which rose every morning like the sun (though somewhat later). Each had her office and function and the tools thereof: the one her sharp combs, the second her little irons of mysterious significance; the third, Elvira, her fingers and her palms, and sponges and water, which knew the art of re-kneading youth and beauty into the feminine form. Elena's first joy in the day was to have the dawn of her beauty hailed by those three worshipers. And hail it they did, effusively, with that extravagance of admiration which women expend upon the beauty of their sex when it is revealed to them from below or from above. For envy of physical charm among women does not go up and down along vertical lines, but spreads horizontally on one social plane.

That morning, too, the beautiful creature, face downward on the divan, her forehead resting on her right arm bent at a right angle, surrendered herself completely from head to heels to the skillful hands which, drawing the towel aside, began to execute their life-giving labors.

"She is as beautiful as one of those statues in the Museum!" murmured the hairdresser to the manicurist: for on an occasional Sunday she went with her husband to

the museum on the Capitol, and looked at the nude figures there not without a twinkle of naughtiness.

"A pair of knees to match you will not find in all Rome," confirmed Elvira in pose of authority, meanwhile rolling her beautiful patient over on her back.

"Lucky the man who gets her now she's a widow!" said the manicurist.

"At my age? Why, you're mad!" interjected Elena, gayly, relaxed on her back, gazing up with half-closed eyes at the ceiling.

"For the love of Heaven, what are you dreaming of, Contessa!" exclaimed the manicurist. "There's many a girl of eighteen who would thank God if . . ."

"Yes, the princes and dukes will be standing in line," persisted the hairdresser.

Elvira assented and began to shame, on the norm of the perfections she was kneading in her hands, the decadence of times that were growing uglier and uglier—she mentioned no names, however, keeping to the general:

"If you only knew, Countess! What things we come across in our business! Women, today? All rubber and whalebone!"

Elena lay listening to that twitter of praise—it was not new to her ears—with more lively pleasure than usual on that Saturday morning, the twenty-third of February. She was satisfied with life. That feeling of satisfaction had been with her from the day when, with the four tears required by propriety, she had seen her husband lowered to his grave. She felt like another human being. She breathed better. Her chest expanded joyously in a new sense of rebirth as though this unexpected widowhood had created a new heaven and a new earth, and things were beginning over again. The actual weight of that unfortunate marriage-chain she had never fully realized till she was free of it; but just why she thrilled so exultantly, just what difference it was all going to make to her, she could not have told.

The Marquis Giulio Spinelli del Galuzzo wanted what

he wanted in earnest, and therefore wanted in earnest to marry her. He had not hesitated a moment. He had not wasted an hour. The moment he heard of her husband's death, he applied for a leave, followed her to Milan, put at her disposal himself in person and the lawyer who handled his affairs in Lombardy. He had been received both better and worse than he expected. Before that Elena had always avoided accepting any pleasures or favors from him, even little ones. This time, no: she not only accepted everything he offered, but for the first time asked things of him, talked with him intimately, unloosened a little, instead of standing always on the defensive. But when Spinelli, waxing warm with encouragement at these promising innovations, alluded to his intentions and hopes, she cut him short with the flat declaration that after such an unfortunate first experience, she did not intend to marry again. But before her husband's death Elena had said nothing to Oliviero of Spinelli's maneuvers, recounting instead, often with exaggerations, the chaffs with which she had discouraged him. This time she had done the opposite. She had written Oliviero of Spinelli's solicitude, but she had not mentioned her refusal to listen to proposals of matrimony. She had gone to the Trinità dei Monti really in a sparkle of love; but she had rebelled and with unusual promptness and decision when her lover demanded a declaration that she had never thought of marrying the marquis. Marriage? Yes. She did think sometimes of marrying; but she thought of it rather as a theoretical possibility. Because . . . whom could she marry? Oliviero was too young: Spinelli she did not want.

But she was gay that morning. For two days her lovesick suitor had been decking the house with flowers and offering his homage in letters ungrammatical but warm. And her lover meantime had sent her two more letters—desperate things: the one written during a sleepless night, the other dipped in the same ink the following day—confessions, both, of error, petitions both, for forgiveness and love. No, she was not going to marry Spinelli, but it

amused her that he should be thinking of it and telling her so. Oliviero she adored, she adored! But she was glad she had refused to put up with his jealousy—it really had overstepped the bounds. And she would be in no hurry to answer his letter. It would do him good to thrash around a little—a lesson he needed and deserved.

Strange riddle of a heart, in short, and no wonder! Elena Asterio was young and she was beautiful. And she was a widow and besought by two passions by no means equivalent the one to the other.

The artist of the magic mauling finished her work. Elena rose to her feet; threw on a dressing-gown all puffs, ruffs, ribbons, and frills. She sat down in an upholstered chair and was about to deliver her head to the combs and her hands to the tools, when a maid knocked, entered, handed her a letter. Elena opened it, read it, put it into the pocket of her dressing-gown. Then she motioned to the two mercenaries of the Graces to begin their labors. But from that moment she was present in the dressing-room in body only. She heard no syllable of the twitter of praise that daily blandished her ears.

In the course of twenty-four hours the world had moved.

"I'll resign first!" thought Oliviero as he left the barracks with the Colonel's orders of transfer. Rightly or wrongly he concluded at once that he was being shifted to Belluno because his comrades were ostracizing him—not because he was a "crack" rider. But he was not thanking Fortune for supplying that unexpected opportunity for an escape involving no manifest humiliation. They were believing his slanderers instead of defending him. His father ought to interfere and get him his rights. But since his father's interference would prove agreeable, he centered all the more on the injustice of which he was the victim, till the real cause of his anger—his despair at leaving Rome before he had been reconciled with Elena—was relegated to a far corner of his mind. He became so deeply and so well enamored of this idea that he was to

protest almost sincerely to his father (but without reference to his ostracism) that his superiors were shipping him off to Belluno because of the gossip on his score, that they were playing him a dirty trick and that he would not submit to it.

But the Senator endured his son's grief quite stoically.

"Those gentlemen at the Ministry might have said a word to me. Once upon a time things were done that way among friends. And if they had apprised me of their intentions, I would have asked them to let the matter drop. I agree with you: the course they have chosen is not the one to meet this talk with. But now the thing is done, and it would be a job to undo it. After all, will the world go to pieces if you spend a few weeks at Belluno? It's not a bad town, and the women are wonders—an important point, I believe, with you. You must grin and bear it. It's all in the day's work in the profession you have chosen."

Disappointed with his father, Oliviero sought consolation with Donna Edvige, objecting, just to make out a case, that he did not want to go to Belluno for the same reasons he had not wanted to go to Africa. The two trials were coming.

"The situation seems a little different," replied Donna Edvige who was not displeased to have her son free from the regiment on an irreproachable excuse. "In that case it was you who were asking leave, for a trip to the end of the world. Now your superiors are ordering you to Belluno on duty. There the authorities can find you at any time, if they need you. That you should prefer Rome to Belluno is natural enough. But you officers in the army are something like monks in a religious order. . . ."

Nor was the advice of Accolti, to whom Oliviero talked at greater length, very different.

"Your colonel is a rat. To avoid trouble he is sacrificing you instead of defending you. There are things which we old inhabitants of 'Jobopolis' divine at sight. I'll wager that while he was telling you they were sending you to Belluno because you are a crack, he was noticing you to

the Minister as the wormy pear in the basket of good ones. The usual double game. . . . But there's no help for it just now. Make the best of it! Go to Belluno! And then get your father to have you recalled as soon as possible. . . ."

But Oliviero suffered that day even less on account of the exile in prospect than on account of Elena's failure to reply to his letter. Love, in certain circumstances, has indeed little patience. The first pang had come at not finding her answer when he returned home from the barracks with news of his transfer. He had really hoped that the letter, balm to his torture, would be waiting for him. All the morning long he watched, trembling at every approach of a servant, each disappointment whetting his expectation. Not knowing what to do, at last he wrote a second letter, the one that Elena received that evening; and he shortened his talk with Accolti only to lay hands the sooner on the letter, the note, the two lines he would surely find at home. . . . Two lines—yes, two lines would have been enough! To get them he would have forgiven the men at the garrison, he would have embraced Spinelli.

But the note was not there. Cyclopean wall of hostility, tetragon to all catapults, Elena's silence continued. At moments it seemed to Oliviero as if that silence could never be broken, never, never again! This time his despair vented itself in a burst against Spinelli. Spinelli, Spinelli! He, the cause of everything! Spinelli had started the gossip about him, had started the ostracism. Spinelli had caused his transfer—and all to get Elena away from him. Well, he would slap his face; and then he would tell Elena about the duel, warning her that if she did not meet him again before it took place, he would get himself killed. He had thought of the duel, of the revenge, of that appointment *in articulo mortis*, almost in that one second; not knowing whether he wanted the duel to avenge the wrong he had suffered, or to force Elena to pardon him, or for both those reasons; and he continued to think of them all together for a time.

But even despair goes in waves. Thinking and thinking, Oliviero began to discover first one, then another, then a third, reason for the failure of the letter to come. Elena had much to do; Elena had not replied at once as a matter of caution; Elena had mailed the letter, instead of sending it by messenger; and step by step he almost convinced himself that he was wrong in worrying; and therewith the duel, with all its consequences, took on a more serious aspect. What would his mother and his father say? What would other people think? How would he explain the provocation?

He idled about the city all the afternoon, rather playing with the thought of the challenge than actually maturing the intention of it. At six he went home, almost calm, certain that Elena's letter had arrived with the afternoon post, and ready again to embrace the world if Elena had forgiven him.

But the letter was not there. The disappointment was too bitter. In a fury of pain he cursed Elena, hurled a chair to the floor, tore a handkerchief to shreds with his teeth. But suddenly he remembered that at that hour every day Spinelli was to be found lounging with the other "Kings of Rome" about a café on the Corso. Desiring to hurt himself by hurting his enemy, knowing that it was an act of lunacy and a scandal—indeed for that very reason —he ran to the café, confronted Spinelli, and demanded of him:

"What have you been saying of me?"

"I say whatever I please!" Spinelli replied.

And Oliviero raised his hand.

In that cuff he gave final and complete expression to all the turbulent passions that had been racking his spirit for those eight days: his grief at the decision of the Sezione d'Accusa, his anxiety for Susanna's health, his jealousy of Elena, his hatred of Spinelli, his bitterness at his comrades in arms, the horrible sense of abjection that came from feeling himself alone against every one. In the person of his rival he slapped all his enemies, the near and the

far, the individual and the impersonal; and the insult delivered, he strode out of the café in the acrid exultation of hatred which, in its first heat, rejoices in harming the enemy even in the harm it does to itself. He did not care what people would say, whether a scandal broke out, whether he might be placed under arrest or retired from his post, whether a rapier thrust might disembowel him. In any event he would show Elena, his father, everybody, that he had blood in his veins, that he would not let himself be imposed upon by any one, that among so many cowards there was one man, at least, ready to defend Truth and Justice even with the sword!

Not entirely out of his mind, and well aware that he had done a dangerous thing in a moment of passion, Oliviero needed to convince himself that he had done it for an adequate motive—the only recourse left open to him to silence the doubts and reproaches his good sense suggested. No, he was not, at that moment, a lover jealous and in fury, because a love-letter had failed to arrive: he was the champion of Truth and of Justice giving the world a lesson in decency!

In this mood of magnanimous disdain, he ran from one end to the other of Rome hunting up his old fencing-master, and an aged baron, a friend of the family, who passed for an authority in matters of arms. He found them at last, explained the situation in his own way, agreed on the necessary arrangements, urging them to attend to the matter as quickly and as secretly as they could. The thought that his father or his mother might hear of what he had done before the duel took place had already come to his mind to breathe a little tarnish upon the morbid glow of his exultance in revenge. It was nine o'clock when he took leave of the second man; but he did not go home for fear of meeting his mother and giving up his secret. He slipped into a tobacco-store and wrote on an ordinary piece of paper the laconic note that Elena received on leaving her bath—telling her of the duel and threatening to let Spinelli kill him if she did not come, the

next day, to their apartment. He left it at her house himself and told the porter to deliver it at once. Then he went to a restaurant, but more to pass the time than to eat—he could not go home before eleven or twelve, when his mother would surely be in her rooms and his father still about town, going from one reception to another.

As he sat eating without appetite, he thought of the duel, of the different thrusts, of the rules, of the hypothetical ground on which he would fight, of the probabilities of wounding and of being wounded. When at last he felt a rapier without a button in his hands, would he still remember the rules, or would it happen with him as with most people—that fencing was one thing, dueling quite another? Would Elena come or would she not? From the restaurant he looked in at a theater, but found it intolerable—he could not concentrate on the play. Nor was a circus of equestrian acrobats any more to his liking. No—everything in the world was precarious, temporary, in the air, and so it would continue to be till he learned whether Elena were coming or not, till the duel was over. The chance that he might wait in vain for Elena, the next day, threw him into a cold sweat. If she failed him, he might be in no condition to fight, his arm might not be strong enough to lift a sword. He was not afraid: but he had no bravado, either. He was a boy, of fickle mood, wavering, now up, now down. This was his first test of this kind. He was afraid rather of being afraid. Suppose he were wounded, seriously wounded, or even . . . And he would try to imagine what a deep gash in the flesh would feel like, recalling pricks, cuts, scratches he had suffered, multiplying the pain by hundreds or thousands till he would shiver with revulsions of disgust and turn to something else.

The next morning, Saturday, after a bad night, he arose at seven, and went out without seeing his parents, leaving word that he had much to do before starting for Belluno, and that if two men came to inquire for him, they would find him at the Army Club between

ten and eleven—this to avoid receiving Spinelli's seconds at his home. While waiting for them at the Club he worked with his fencing-master. They came at eleven. He forthwith sent them to the Hunt Club to meet his own seconds. Then he returned to his lesson. But he was touched at every moment, without ever reaching his antagonist; he made mistake after mistake, nothing but mistakes. He could not keep his mind on the work.

Again at home for luncheon, he faced his parents with beating heart. But neither Donna Edvige nor the Senator had heard of the duel: Oliviero was able to isolate himself in silence in the numerous company gathered that day about the table. At three he was at the house of the baron, his second. The arrangements had been made. The duel would take place the following morning at nine, in a villa outside the Porta del Popolo. The weapons would be sabers, sharpened at the points and edges, slashing also being allowed. The contestants would wear fencing gloves, but starched shirts and cloth vests were banned.

Oliviero's heart sank. The duel became a crushing reality now that it awaited him at a specified point in space and time. A strange presentiment of defeat came over him, leaving him in a state of utter weariness of everything. He felt like a tenant in life, certain within twenty-four hours to be dispossessed at the beck of an invisible and capricious landlord, though in the midst of the great depression his desire for Elena flamed anew with despairing violence. Within less than a day he might be dead! What if Elena did not come?

He was at their little nest at half-past four, a half-hour early, cursing the slowness of the passing moments, yet dismayed at their too rapid flight. It seemed impossible that Elena should come, and yet impossible that she should fail; and from this tempest of love sprang, desperate consoler, the idea of death. To fortify his claim upon her, he thought of himself as already dead. Yes, that would be his last day on earth; it had to be glorified

by a last taste of happiness. She would come! She would come!

When the clock struck five, his excitement soared to an unendurable height. One minute, two minutes passed. He threw himself on the sofa, his eyes closed, his fists clenched. When all of a sudden . . . was it an illusion? Had not the door in the outer hall discreetly opened and closed? It was no illusion. A second later Elena swept into the room.

"But what has happened? What has happened?" she cried, anxiously.

She had struggled with herself; but knowing that she was the occasion and the prize of the duel, Oliviero's threat that he would let himself be killed, which on any other lips would have made her laugh, had frightened her love, awakened in her a trace of remorse not lacking in its vain satisfaction, disarmed her proud determination to torment him to the end. She had not, however, abandoned her intention of being strong "with an unvanquishable strength"; she had come, it is true—but resolved not to lose her head.

By dint of imagining himself dead that next day, Oliviero for his part had almost convinced himself; and, wasting no time in explanations—"He lied about me—I slapped his face!"—he at once put forward his claims as a dying man. Caught unprepared by his sudden impetuousness, Elena resisted as best she could. She lowered her head as in shame, and murmured in a faint, frightened voice:

"No, no, no! Not today . . ."

"But I am to die tomorrow!"

"Don't say such a thing even in jest!"

She had raised her head and was trying to press her hand over his mouth.

But Oliviero seized her by her two wrists, forced them together behind her back and stood gazing into her eyes:

"Yes, but suppose I should die tomorrow? Spinelli loves you. He wants you. If he does not kill me, it will not be

for lack of a will to . . . He is one of the best blades in Italy. . . ."

To force his claims along the line he had chosen he was making Spinelli out an invincible antagonist. Elena tore her arms free, flung them about his neck, and rested her head on his shoulder:

"Oliviero, Oliviero! Don't! All this hurts me too much."

"Really? Really?" he persisted, flaming. "Suppose I should die tomorrow—you would weep for me? You would remember me? You would think of me? . . . Then, I don't care whether I die or not! . . ."

And his two arms were about her hips, trying to lift her from the floor. Elena was now fighting herself more than the youth before her. She clung desperately to his neck, murmuring in the same faint voice:

"Oh, Oliviero—I don't want to have any regrets, tomorrow . . ."

"It would be a regret? And suppose I do not come back . . . ?"

"To say no hurts me more than it hurts you. But I am afraid . . ."

"If you love me, I shall be invincible."

And Elena suddenly forgot herself, the duel, the morrow, transported beyond time and space in a vertiginous flight of passion. Was it for a second, for an hour, for a century? She did not know. But when, at last, she came to herself again, her eyes were resting on a little clock faintly lighted by a candle on the night-table. There it had been standing impassibly marking the minutes and the hours of that frenzy as well!

"Oliviero!" she cried. "A quarter to eight! I must fly! . . ."

At that threatening frown of Time which had returned after a measureless absence to remind her of engagements, Elena found the courage to tear herself away. In a few minutes she was again standing in front of Oliviero, her hat and veil adjusted, her coat on. She was holding out to him a little object in gold and lapis lazuli.

"Take it!" she said. "It's a charm, Oliviero. An old Turkish pasha gave it to my grandmother, who was a Russian. He said it had saved his life in twenty battles. It will bring you back without a scratch. And we meet again here tomorrow, at five. . . ."

In those three hours of happiness, Oliviero had told her what had happened or at least what he believed had happened. After "putting him in quarantine," Spinelli had procured his transfer to Belluno, in order to have a clear field in Rome. Elena saw at once that her coquetries had unwittingly encouraged Spinelli in this aggressiveness, and remorse impelled her to more expansive outbursts than ever. No, she despised Spinelli—she had been using him only as a convenience to return more quickly to Rome. His advances she had met with gibes and insolences, and finally with a brusque "no" which she had so far withheld. But really to make amends she would join Oliviero at Belluno. In Venice there was a lady who had a beautiful villa for rent a few miles from Belluno. Oliviero would leave first. Then, a few days later, she would go to Venice ostensibly, but to rent the villa, and shut herself up in it as in a convent, waiting for a little visit from him every day.

And she was sincere in all that: she was happy, when she had gone, that she had made Oliviero happy. She averred to herself that she would never flirt with any one again, that she would love Oliviero until he tired of her and then—retire from the world to a real convent.

For Oliviero too a joyous puff of wind seemed to have dispersed all clouds of worry from his mind. Forgotten the regiment, the gossip of Rome, and Spinelli! Forgotten even Susanna and Marietta! The face of the world was shining with a new beauty, with just one spot, a very little spot, though most annoying: the duel. Why should he risk getting himself killed just at that moment when he would have liked to be immortal? Or why kill Spinelli when in this unexpected happiness he felt rather like embracing him? It was his unhappy love that had prayed for death as friend and liberator; love triumphant repelled

that chill recourse with a shiver. What a mistake to have provoked the duel without real cause! What joy, could he undo what he had done! Unfortunately he couldn't: and from hour to hour chagrin at the blunder grew apace. He was actually despondent when he found himself again alone in his room, facing the dreary hours of a sleepless night. No, he would not fight in earnest, with all his might: the impulse of hatred had failed him for that. He would get out of it as cheaply as possible, taking a wound perhaps, a slight one! But even this notion of a half-hearted defense was an odious burden that first blurred, then spoiled, then finally extinguished, all joyous thoughts in his mind.

"Quiet and a good sleep for the twenty-four hours preceding!" Such the parting counsel of his old second. And sleep he would! But his very eagerness to get to sleep, the thought that every minute of wakefulness was robbing him of its portion of stamina, made things worse. The clock of a neighboring church seemed to be admonishing him every quarter of an hour in a slow, clear voice, almost spelling the words letter by letter in the night:

"Another quarter gone! You have so many quarters left to regain condition."

He remembered the stroke of two distinctly. He was awake again at the stroke of five and at six he rose, his arms and legs weary, his head dull and cloudy. He was even more tired than when he went to bed. He could not leave home on such a morning without bidding his mother good-by; yet with that secret on his conscience he could not look her in the eye. The nearer the test approached, the more desperate his chagrin at having to face it for no better cause than his own impulsive blundering. And how wretched he felt! He could not have been worse prepared for a duel. Far from attacking, he could not even defend himself.

To avoid risk of meeting his father, and at the same time to quiet his nerves, he left the house, walked the streets for a time and finally took refuge in a café. He

would wait there, drifting along with his own thoughts, till the appointed hour when his seconds and the doctor would drive up in a carriage, not to the door of his palace, but to a corner near by—that the suspicions of the porter and the servants be not aroused.

The drive was silent and, as it seemed to Oliviero, unending. He felt like a dying invalid to be addressed only in hushed voices. He could hardly wait to leap from that sinister vehicle.

But at last one of his seconds exclaimed in a subdued tone:

"Here we are!"

And the slowing down of the carriage warned him that they were at the goal. For a painful second he was really afraid of being afraid. But he pulled himself together, stepped resolutely from the carriage and passed with his company through a gate which at their approach had been half opened.

Silently they crossed a lawn at the corner of a country house that filled all the background. They entered a great vestibule through an open door. Had he not observed a carriage standing in front of the gate, the sound of voices coming from a room at the right would have warned him that his adversary was there. . . .

"Our room is over here," said the aged Baron, motioning to the left.

The room contained no furniture save a table placed squarely in the center, and a few chairs. The seconds unrolled the sabers on the table and the doctor, his instruments. Then they went out, all three taking with them the swords, the gloves, and the instruments, bidding Oliviero remove his coat, his vest and his shirt. He did not feel the cold—he was too nervous for that. What he felt was a complete physical and moral prostration—utter impotence in the face of danger. Why had they left him alone? Yet he would have been almost terrified at the sound of their footsteps, returning.

Yet footsteps there were: his fencing-master came in.

"Why, Alamanni, what are you thinking of? Do you want to catch your death of cold?" And he threw a cloak over the boy's shoulders. "Come, everything is ready! We have found a good piece of ground in the lane over there. And remember now, eh?—cool, cool!"

Oliviero followed him into a drive lined with black oaks that ran along one end of the house, stunned, half-dreaming, not knowing what would become of him a few minutes thence. He stopped at an order from his fencing-master. There in front of him stood Spinelli, already at his post. He took off his coat and tossed it aside on the grass. His other second came up and pulled a heavy glove over his right forearm up to the elbow. Mechanically Oliviero opened and closed his fingers several times to see that his hand played free.

And the second handed him the saber.

CHAPTER VI

Truth with playful guile went on Her way laying traps infernal for Logic and for the evil Passions that band together with Logic. By suggesting to Gaetano that Marietta's letter had reached the police through his Signora, and by putting into his ear the flea that his Signora had been using him to build up a false charge against Marietta, Don Michele succeeded in giving Gaetano such a fright that no further steps in that direction were necessary: Gaetano went on from there, frightening himself of his own accord with nightmares of his own devising. The letter had not left his coat, nor the coat his room: the door he had locked with a double lock! How then? How then? There was one possible explanation: Giovanna, Giovanna, the pretty girl on the fourth floor,

maid in the superintendent's family, the girl who had vowed to scratch his eyes out on the stairs that day when the newspapers revealed his engagement to Marietta!

Giovanna was the mysterious recipient of Gaetano's nocturnal calls, those visits which had been discovered in due time by the Argus in petticoats in Casa Cavalieri, and left unpunished because of the decadence of the times. Yes, even that Saturday too, the day he received the fatal letter, Gaetano had gone up to her room when the Cavalieri lights went out. The night was cold, and sometimes he had to wait on the stairs for "the Super's" lights to go out. So he had put on his coat, the coat which had the letter in a pocket. Giovanna, therefore, may have been the hand, or rather the claw, used by Donna Emilia to get those scraps of paper away from him, taking advantage of a moment's inattention on his part (there had been many such in the course of the night)!

Linking up this rough and ready conjecture with the accusations formulated by Don Michele against the Signora, Gaetano was able with the help of his rather rascally Logic to convince himself that he had found the loose end in the whole tangle: his mistress had been spying and she had discovered that Marietta was writing to him. She had naturally wanted to read the letters; so she had got Martina to steal them from him. Martina, of course, must have found out about his affair with Giovanna—keep anything from that she-devil who nosed after everybody and into everything! Everybody in Rome knew that the Signora was ugly, stingy, mean, always ready to get a poor devil into trouble. She had shown that this time too: the moment she gets hold of his letter, she tells the police he has lied for money—just to show how mean she could be! And he—he had lost his head! Fearing now they were to find out about his blackmailing Lieutenant Alamanni, he had stupidly given color to the Signora's accusation and got himself into that nasty fix! Now Don Michele had opened his eyes at last. Still in time? Or too late? That was the question. And the ques-

tion was the besetting torture of his sleepless nights. He felt he was being watched by the porter, by the coachman, by Martina, by the other maids—by everybody in the house. He was no longer exchanging a syllable with any one. He had torn down the newspaper sketches from the wall in the kitchen and from the wall in his room. He kept asking himself how many years in jail a slip of that kind might cost a fellow. On the street he would cross to the other side whenever he saw a carabiniere's bicorne in the distance. He shivered every time the bell rang—and it rang every other minute. . . .

Gaetano was caught on that bed of thorns on that twenty-first of February, by a sheet of paper, half in print, half in scrawls, that bade him appear in the presence of Justice in Her human form at an hour set just two days thereafter. His own portrait in a costume with stripes rose before his mind and he hurried straight to Don Michele, beside himself with fear. But Don Michele reassured him: Gaetano had a way of getting free which could not fail—he should tell the plain truth!

To Gaetano, as to almost all humble folk who live in obedience to others, truth was not that thing one should always rely on and always tell, but a thing a poor devil should distrust on principle and conceal even when he was not at fault. People with money enough to satisfy their whims could sometimes afford it: but poor folks, never! Let a poor man tell the truth and he's straightway in a pickle! Reënforced by a fair amount of inborn rascality, this fear of the truth had made of Gaetano, as of so many other proletarians, a little genius at falsehood, not only clever at inventing lies offhand and sticking to them in the face of suspicion, of reason, of the flat contradiction of fact, but ready to lie with equal zest whether in hiding a wrong or in defending a right, so convinced was he that only lies succeed in this world, that only by lies can Truth herself get a hearing. At first blush Gaetano considered Don Michele's advice inconsistent, dangerous, foolhardy; and that night he stealthily packed his things

and left by the servants' door (on which he had oiled the hinges for another reason) with half an idea of taking French leave from the country. But, during the daytime of Friday, leisure and solitude gave him opportunity to think: in part the advice of Don Michele, in part the fact that he was a little short of money to begin life in exile, in part the memory of the "sifted sunlight" he had seen years before and a wholesome fear of seeing it again, all worked together to patch up the semblance of a conscience for him. Those, moreover, were not ordinary days! So he decided, for once, to pay respectful homage to the divinity called Honesty. He appeared, very low in spirits, before the Judge, disavowed the accusation he had made against Marietta, attributed it to his bewilderment at the time of his arrest. Point for point he confirmed Marietta's testimony, handed her first letter over to the Judge, averred that Martina could not have found the others in the kitchen because he had placed them in the right-hand pocket of his overcoat; and finally bared his relations with Giovanna, expounding his new theory as to the strange disappearance of the two documents: Martina had induced Giovanna to steal them—in whose behalf and at whose instance he could not say.

But on this the first occasion in his life when Gaetano told what in good faith he believed to be the truth, he did not succeed in gaining credence! The Judge was much put out at seeing the judiciary truth which he had constructed with such great concentration and skill knocked over in that fashion. He cross-examined Gaetano for a long time in an effort to catch him in some contradiction. But that Judge was a conscientious judge. If he sought a truth that conformed only to judiciary standards, at least he upheld those standards. He knew that judiciary tests are infallible and precarious at one and the same time—precarious as against each other, infallible as against truths of every other order and kind. He saw at once that if that first letter of Marietta's which Gaetano now offered in evidence was genuine, the Law had to hold that the money

had really been asked for in connection with a marriage compact and that Gaetano's accusation of Marietta was false. After questioning Gaetano, he hurried to the prison again and asked Marietta, who was still in a daze from the disappointments of her previous examination, whether she had written a letter on such and such a day, and whether she remembered what she had said in it. The snatches that Marietta could quote from memory fitted like a glove with Gaetano's text. There could be no doubt that the handwriting on the paper was Marietta's. The jurist, accordingly, went over to Gaetano's recantation: his former accusation stood belied by a stronger judiciary proof—the letter!

But if the Judge concluded that Marietta had not attempted to suborn perjury, he was not so ready to believe that Gaetano had lied under stress of emotion—the usual excuse of all rascals caught in a trap. He immediately scented "court business," and settled on the same track of fiscal logic that Don Michele was following: Signora Cavalieri had trumped up the charge against Marietta out of revenge, and Gaetano had connived with Signora Cavalieri! On the strength of Marietta's letter, mistress and cook had plotted the false complaint at Headquarters, the feigned surprise in the Piazza Termini, the feigned accusation under questioning. And now the cook was trying to save himself without compromising his mistress by accusing Martina and Giovanna! But did the man think any one could believe that Martina had plotted with Giovanna to steal a letter which only by a singular and unforeseeable chance happened to be in the lover's pocket on that particular night? It seemed to the Judge that, on the assumption that Donna Emilia and Gaetano were accomplices, everything could be explained; and since everything had to be explained, the Judge decided to change his tack and summon Donna Emilia, Giovanna, and Martina before him.

This new move was known to the Commendatore, ever on the alert, by Saturday evening; and on Sunday morn-

ing he passed the news along to Senator Alamanni and to Lawyer Malaguzzi: Gaetano had retracted and admitted Marietta's innocence—the Court was suspecting a plot on Donna Emilia's part and feeling out for an indictment of criminal slander against her. Alamanni beamed his congratulations upon the Commendatore, complimented the Judge on his ability, and immediately returned to the charge on "that other matter," urging again that it be settled at once.

Malaguzzi defended Donna Emilia, protesting that the Judge was on a false scent; but—"You always would do things in your own way," he thought, "and now you're in a pretty mess!" Actually the Judge's suspicions did not seem at all absurd to Malaguzzi—for the very reason that they were not true! And he sent for Donna Emilia in great haste even though it was Sunday. Knowing that among all things holy Sunday was the only one that Malaguzzi respected, Donna Emilia came hurrying in at two o'clock, much surprised at his haste. It was Malaguzzi's idea to send her home in a conniption fit: so he explained to her, as only he could explain, how Gaetano had recanted, how the charges had been inverted, how the Court was looking at things just then. . . . But if in ordinary circumstances it was not easy to frighten a woman who never thought she was wrong even when she was manifestly so, how about now, when she knew she had done nothing and felt absolutely in the right?

Donna Emilia listened attentively for a moment or two, then suddenly, putting a forefinger to her forehead, she exclaimed:

"Now I see! Ah, now I see!"

Her tone was so decisive that Malaguzzi halted, waiting expectantly to learn what she had seen, almost persuaded that she really had seen!

"You say Gaetano is accusing Martina of getting Giovanna to steal his letters? The liar! The liar! Why, we never could discover who the strumpet was, though he was carrying on with her right under my own roof! But now I

know! Now I know! . . . But he tells the truth in one thing: when he says he did not lose the letters. Catch that rascal forgetting compromising documents in a kitchen! It's as clear as daylight: he put them there on purpose for Martina to find them!"

"Signora . . ." the lawyer tried to interrupt, a faint smile playing about his lips, partly at the lady's "discovery," partly at himself for ever having for a second imagined that such a woman could ever say a sensible thing! But Donna Emilia gave him not a chance. She caught her breath and dashed onward, more confident, more impetuous than ever:

"Why, of course—that's just it, just it exactly! The Alamannis again, trying to ruin me and to ruin Martina, because we are the two witnesses for the Crown! . . . Why did that rascal ever tell Martina that Marietta was offering him heaven and earth? Why did he first accuse her and then retract? Why did he come and ask me for money, which, thank heaven, I didn't give him? And why did he skip out the other night, giving us all such a fright, as I told you?"

For, on Friday morning two days before, Casa Cavalieri sailed skyward and Malaguzzi himself was not a little upset, when it was discovered that Gaetano had taken flight during the night. Prompt investigation, however, had established that nothing was missing in the house: and as to the fugitive's whereabouts, the janitor's wife, artfully questioned by Martina, betrayed the address Gaetano had left with her—a cheap hotel on the Via Alessandrina.

"So you explain all these mysteries if you can, Malaguzzi!" And Signora Cavalieri paused for a second, as though waiting for a reply if the lawyer chose to make one. "Why, a blind man could see it: they wanted to accuse me of bribing Gaetano to accuse Marietta! Lucky for me that all I did was to bring the letters Martina found in the kitchen here to you! . . . By the way, what do you get for stealing people's letters?"

"Oh, in your case, as much as three years. . . . There has been damage as well. . . . Article 159!"

"There you have it! There you have it!" cried Donna Emilia. "The rascals can't accuse me of bribing Gaetano! So they now accuse Martina of stealing the letters!"

She sat silent a second: then an idea struck her:

"Malaguzzi, couldn't we have that rogue of a cook arrested?"

Donna Emilia's Logic, knowing the temper of Her mistress well, had put on seven-league boots, and rushing headlong, leaping improbabilities, difficulties, objections, had arrived at a conclusion—and at the truth! Malaguzzi knew that arguing never stopped the woman; so he lifted two arms to Heaven:

"For the love of God, Signora! Let us think of our own hides for the moment and never mind arresting other people. What is that maid of yours going to say when the Judge starts frying her on his grill?"

"She's going to tell the truth!" replied Donna Emilia promptly, flatly.

"In other words?" queried Malaguzzi ironically, as though hinting that in that case too, truth might be various and numerous.

"That she found the letters in the kitchen!" snapped Donna Emilia resentfully—for her there was always one truth, her truth!

"Signora," said the lawyer with deliberate, crushing calm, "a criminal charge is not a slash with a knife that a person can deliver unintentionally in an access of passion or madness. It stands proved that your cook laid a false charge against the Sorbi girl. The Court must now ask how he came to make it. The Judge, as I said and as I say again, does not believe, any more than you do, that the letters were stolen. He suspects rather that the man acted in connivance with you, Signora, and at your instigation! A crazy notion, agreed; but for that very reason it would be well for your maid to weigh her words carefully when she is questioned. . . ."

"But Martina will say simply that she found the letters in the kitchen! Why should she change that? It's the truth!"

"Are you sure it's the truth, Signora?"

"Martina never lies to me, never!" replied Donna Emilia with that concise and decisive finality that puts an end to unpleasant discussions.

"I'm glad of that!" said the lawyer, convinced that for that harpy a mere man was no match at all.

Donna Emilia departed, certain that she had discovered a new plot against Martina, impatient to thwart it, tingling to defend her talking dog, as she would have defended herself. Her impulsive and capricious goodness of heart that always needed some one to protect even from imaginary dangers, if real ones were lacking, that gratitude which bound her to all who let themselves be helped by her in her own way, were this time going out to do battle, encouraged by a new feeling that skulked somewhat shamefaced among her other feelings, because it knew that it should not have been in such good company—a certain secret feeling of satisfaction that Martina should be caught in a pickle! Perfectly aware of all that her faithful maid had done for her, Donna Emilia was beginning to weary of that air of self-esteem which was now breathing from every one of Martina's acts and words—the conviction that she, Martina, had done, seen, guessed it all! Donna Emilia was therefore glad of a chance to show her at last, that for once, even she, Martina, had made a mistake—oh, not to hurt Martina's feelings, on the contrary to love and fondle her more tenderly than usual; since now to all her other qualities she was adding the virtue of leaving infallibility to her mistress!

So it came about that Martina, much worried by that unusual Sunday call from the lawyer and fearing that the Signora might come home with bad news and in one of her usual fits of temper, saw her reappear as beaming as a week of fine weather, and found herself towed into Donna

Emilia's bedroom with a caressing, almost motherly, "Come with me, darling!" that augured well.

But instead the Signora began:

"Martina dear, I'm so sorry—I have bad news for you! We are dealing with the Devil in person! I'm afraid you have made a bad mistake in your eagerness to help me!"

"What's up now?" thought Martina, who had not been expecting such a shower of cold rain from a sky so blue.

"But don't you be afraid! I'll stand by you, and no one will touch a hair of your head—even if I have to spend the last centime I have in the world. To begin at the beginning: you were right! Gaetano has retracted the charge against Marietta. And unfortunately he has also brought out a certain letter Marietta wrote. . . ."

"Those two birds were always in cahoots, Signora! I told you so all along!"

"Let me talk!" answered Donna Emilia, irritated. "Dear Martina, ever since *that* happened, you have been the eye of Providence in this house! Had it not been for you that terrible woman would have got clear with her crime! I shall never forget all that you have done for me. But this time you have not been so fortunate. . . . I am not blaming you, because every one makes mistakes. For that matter, I almost fell into the trap myself. . . ."

"You too—in a trap?" asked Martina in amazement.

"You see, we are the key witnesses for the Crown. . . . Some one very shrewd has been using Gaetano to get us into trouble. The idea was to get us to make a false charge and then involve us with the law. Gaetano told you all that about the offers Marietta was making; then he slyly left those letters in the kitchen where you could find them . . ."

"Gaetano? . . . Gaetano left those letters in the kitchen? . . . So that I could find them?"

Martina was more amazed than ever, because really, this time, she could not believe her ears!

"Of course! You told me yourself one day that Gaetano was too clever a rascal to leave letters of importance lying

around. The letter you found in the kitchen he did not lose: he put it there on purpose! . . ."

"Who has been stuffing you with such nonsense, Signora?" interrupted Martina, clasping her hands in sheer pity. "Malaguzzi? . . . And you believe him?"

Martina's motherly solicitude for the softening of her mistress's brain cried so loud in these words—they could only mean "You poor old dolt of a woman, you are crazy!"—that Donna Emilia took offense. She had never felt very pleased at going back into swaddling clothes under Martina's counsel and care. She was not more so now when she was just rolling up her sleeves to protect Martina with such motherly fondness.

"Nonsense? Nonsense you call it? After all these years, Martina, you should have learned that when I say a thing I know what I am talking about! And this time I am talking, not in my own interest, but in yours!"

"But, Signora!" persisted Martina with the affectionate compassion of a mother who tries to quiet a fussing child. "You really believe Gaetano put those letters in the kitchen too . . . ? You really think that?"

"I know he did!"

"Signora! . . ."

Martina, in common with Gaetano and all the populace that wears the yoke of obedience, had an instinctive distrust of the truth, and a constant inclination, as between telling the truth and falsifying, to falsify. But this time she was hesitating and wondering whether it were not her duty to open her mistress's eyes, persuade her not to trust "that lawyer," by telling her the truth. . . . For she knew the truth; in fact she was the only one who knew the truth, because Marietta's troubles too, like the troubles of Susanna, had budded and blossomed in Martina's distorted brain.

Gaetano was sincere when he swore that he had put the letters into his coat pocket. But he was the victim of one of those little slips of memory that at times are the seed of so much trouble. He had read the letters in the kitchen,

to be sure; but that was after, and not before, he went to his room to change his clothes. He had put the letters, not into the pocket of his street coat, but into the pocket of the white smock he worked in; and then he had started to prepare dinner. Martina had seen him put them where actually he had put them, and she had made a plan: if that night too as on other nights Gaetano went out on "his usual prowl" leaving the key to his room unturned in the keyhole (perhaps so as not to make any noise), she would go in and get the letters and give them to her mistress, telling her that she had found them in the kitchen!

Fortune favored her. For his nightly session with his girl, Gaetano changed from his smock to his street coat; and in the pocket of the former, left hanging on a hook in his room, Martina quickly found what she was looking for.

So far she had thought that this little theft was one of the services she could not reveal to her mistress, "who could never understand certain things." But just now she hesitated; partly because she did not like to see her mistress fed such rot by a crooked lawyer, partly because her pride was pricked that that same fool of a lawyer should be reproaching her for falling into a trap like a ninny; when she, and she alone, had seen everything from the start! This combination of offended vanity and motherly affection for her mistress overcame her distrust of the truth.

"Signora," she began again after another moment's hesitation, "I will tell you what really happened! . . . I haven't done so before, because I was afraid you would scold me. That evening Gaetano went out, as usual. . . . You understand. . . . I knew that he never locked his room when he went out at night. Night was the only time he trusted us because he thought we were all asleep. But that night I was not asleep. I was awake! I went to his room and found the letters! . . ."

"You didn't!" cried Donna Emilia.

"How can you say I didn't?" asked Martina, somewhat disconcerted by that thundering contradiction.

"I know everything! I even know who Gaetano went to see that night! Do you? No, you don't! Very well, let me tell you: he went to see Giovanna, the maid on the fourth floor. You see, I know what I am talking about! . . ."

"But, Signora, I swear . . ." objected Martina, more and more dumbfounded.

Martina had expected a dressing-down from her mistress when she told the truth, but she had expected a dressing-down because she had assumed she would be believed. She had never expected a dressing-down for being a liar, at the one moment in her life when she was telling the truth—or almost the truth! But Donna Emilia could not believe that Martina had taken the letters as and where she said she had taken them. For one thing, it seemed a violation of the cosmic order that the servant should deny what the mistress affirmed. Then again she, the mistress, could not admit to herself that a servant had committed, under her roof and as a favor to her, an act of larceny that might cost the woman three years in prison—three, no more, no less, the lawyer had said so! She broke in on Martina:

"That will do! That will do! I know—you are always the only one with brains—the shrewdest, cleverest person that ever was, the one who never makes a mistake. . . . But let me tell you: your smartness this time may cost you dear. For your information, I'll tell you that for 'finding' a letter in a room in the absence of the person it's addressed to you can go to jail for three years! You know what Gaetano says? He says you got Giovanna to steal the letters from him. . . . Just that! . . . He says that that evening he went out to see that strumpet with his coat on and the letters in his pocket. He says that Giovanna stole them from him at your instigation, while they were together there! . . ."

"But I didn't even know Giovanna was his girl!" objected Martina.

"I know you didn't! That's why the whole story is absurd. And the Judge does not believe it either. But if Gaetano knew that you were accusing yourself of taking the letters from his room—why, all he'd have to do would be to remember that he left them there, and you would have sent yourself to jail at your own trouble and pains! . . ."

As Donna Emilia talked, Martina had slowly lowered her head, as if trying to hide away in silence from her mistress and from herself. She neither moved nor spoke when her mistress finished. She just stood there, petrified. But after waiting in vain for a second or two, Donna Emilia exploded:

"Oh, get out—I'm tired of you! You're just an old fool! Some one ought to crack that stubborn skull of yours. Get out! I can't bear the sight of you!"

But at this point Martina jerked her head up, struck her forehead with her right hand and cried:

"Yes, I remember, I remember, Signora. . . . It was four or five days ago. . . . No, it was about a week before I found the letter. . . . Gaetano told me, laughing, 'But if the mistress wants to get rid of Marietta's testimony, why doesn't she come to me? I know how to fix her!' . . ."

"He said that? . . . He really said that?" Donna Emilia was in good humor again.

"He said that . . . and he also said . . . Now when was it? . . . I don't exactly remember. . . . Anyway, one day he showed me a letter—I don't know whether it was from Marietta—it had not passed through my hands! He said to me, 'If the mistress only knew what was written in this letter she would give a pile of thousand-lire bills this high! . . .' I didn't say anything to you, because I thought it was part of his usual bragging."

"And instead he was doing it on purpose—on purpose to arouse your suspicions so that you would tell me what he had said. . . ."

"Of course, of course! . . . And every day he harped on the same thing: Marietta was making certain pro-

posals, hinting certain things. . . . He could be rich if he wanted to! . . . I didn't pay much attention—I was used to that sort of thing; and I didn't say anything to you because I didn't want to waste your time. But now I understand, I understand. . . . That evening—this is what happened . . . when he came back from outside, I handed him the letter in the kitchen. He took it, looked at it, and went away; and he came back into the kitchen in his white smock with the letter still unopened in his hand. Then he opened it and read it. . . ."

"Gaetano says he read the letter the moment you gave it to him, before he changed his clothes."

"He lies! And I would like to see if he'll have the courage to stick to that in front of me, when I saw him with my own eyes! He read the letter and put it in his pocket. Then he began singing and strutting around . . . to show me he was glad he had received the letter! . . . And at half-past eleven, I went into the kitchen and saw the letter at once, not stuck in sideways next to the sugar canister as I told you—to gain a little bit of credit that didn't belong to me. . . . The letter was there on the table in the middle of the room, just under the light —put there on purpose, of course—on purpose for me to see it and take it. . . . You are right, quite right! I am the poor idiot! If it weren't for you I wouldn't have caught on at all! . . . You have opened my eyes, Signora . . . now I understand!"

"And I hit it this time too!" thought Donna Emilia a little later as she dismissed Martina. And "Poor Signora!" thought Martina for her part. "You would never take her for the same woman! How she has changed!"

Those two women, in an orgy of outdoing each other in maternal protection, had been on the point of coming to blows because neither was willing to be the child in arms. Martina was the stronger of the two and at a certain moment she realized that, in holding her ground, she was only exasperating her mistress without convincing her. So she had yielded, telling a lie just to be ac-

commodating, falsifying in the measure required by the occasion and without scruple or hesitation, sure as she was of fulfilling her duty as an affectionate servant toward the best, though the most unfortunate, of mistresses, and with all the tenderness of a mother telling a charitable lie to a restless child. What did she care about what was true and what was false, about Gaetano, Marietta and the letters they wrote, about the Judge, his Court, or even the prison with which the Signora had threatened her? The one thing that mattered was her fanatical love that was bent on dominating, serving. And everything she would have accepted, even prison, everything she considered lawful, even lying, everything seemed useful to her, even the truth, provided it helped her in serving—in making her mistress, that is, do what she, Martina, wished—that mistress who was such a tyrant and yet such a dear, dear baby!

CHAPTER VII

"Have you never asked yourself how Christianity ever came to symbolize Divinity in the Cross, which was the gallows, the ax, the guillotine, of the time of Jesus? Why should the crux of the Passion be a judicial error? Why did the Son of God, to redeem mankind, elect to be put to death by sentence of a royal court and at the hands of a royal executioner? You never thought of that? Well, no one ever thinks of it—and yet Christ hangs there crying from His Cross: 'Lo, here am I, the Son of God and the Redeemer, here by legal sentence of a legal tribunal, a sentence demanded and acclaimed by the public opinion and the newspaper editorials of my day! Judge ye from my fate what human Justice is worth, and the State in whose name she speaks, the Wealth that nourishes and clothes her, the Science that lends her its eyes, the

newspapers that serve her as mouthpieces and prompters, the Opinion of the World that admires her!'"

This outburst was the conclusion of a number of unusual incidents which had happened that Sunday, the twenty-fourth of February, and not to Accolti only.

Accolti sat reading in his wretched little study, his coat over his shoulders and a blanket across his knees—for that winter Susanna's defense had devoured even the fuel for his stove. But at about two o'clock, in came Oliviero Alamanni, his cap and coat soaked with rain, his face pale as death:

"I have killed Marquis Spinelli!" he cried.

And he went on to narrate—though just how it had happened he could not explain—an affair of honor with the marquis. During the whole onset—there had been but one—he felt as though he had forgotten how to fence. He had been throwing his saber carelessly about, he was always off guard. But no! All of a sudden, Spinelli staggers, and then he falls—a bad wound in the neck! He, Oliviero, had not intended it—he did not know how it happened—yet he had wounded Spinelli seriously. He may have killed him! Now . . . he did not dare go back to his father and his mother with such a piece of news!

Accolti did not ask as to the cause of the duel—he supposed he knew. He tried to calm the boy as best he could, suggesting that he himself go and inquire about the wounded man and break the news to Oliviero's parents. And he went, leaving Oliviero there among his books to await his return. And Oliviero sat alone in that uncomfortable, fireless study, rehearsing the incomprehensible memories of that horrible morning, trying to simplify their absurd confusion, protesting to himself that—no! no, he had not intended, he had never intended . . . It had really been an accident! The sword had struck—not his will, not his intention! . . .

But fear that he had killed a man, shame at thought of his father and his mother, the first shiver of a soul be-

sprinkled, and horrified, by that spurt of blood, had wrecked in an instant the scaffolding of pretexts and insincerities behind which Oliviero had hitherto been hiding from himself. However hard his reason tried to prove that he had wounded Spinelli accidentally, his conscience had been crying aloud since morning that he had challenged Spinelli, wounded Spinelli, perhaps killed Spinelli, because and only because of his exasperation at Elena's failure to write. Whether he were a good man or a bad man he had never asked himself. For the first time, that day, perceiving that he had done a thing he would never have believed he could do, that he had wounded and perhaps killed a man to force a sulking mistress to come to a rendezvous, he had been overwhelmed by that feeling of unworthiness which only the good experience after a sin, for the very reason that they are not unworthy—the really unworthy have no such qualms! And into that sense of his own unworthiness he plunged deeper and deeper as he waited for his friend to return, sitting in that bleak study, in which, aside from a plain writing-desk, two second-hand armchairs and a cold stove, there was nothing but books, books, books! Accolti had renounced everything, even the bit of wood required to light a fire, just to help some one more unfortunate than he. And there he sat himself, stuffed with comforts and luxuries *ad nauseam;* and he had not been capable of renouncing even one amusement and one point of pride—Elena was that and only that to him! He had done what he had done to keep her away from an honest man who loved her and was willing to marry her! . . .

Meanwhile Accolti's arrival at the Alamanni house was somewhat of an earthquake. Oliviero's parents had not been worried at his failure to appear at luncheon. They were accustomed to such absences. They supposed that he was going the rounds taking leave of people before his departure. On learning the truth, the Senator and Donna Edvige looked at each other without speaking, but understanding nevertheless.

"Is he really unhurt? You are telling me the whole truth, Count Accolti?" That was Alamanni's first remark.

"Is Marquis Spinelli really in danger?" This the first thought of Donna Edvige.

But neither of them sought the cause of the duel. They too believed they knew. Reassured as to Oliviero's safety, Alamanni fell silent. Donna Edvige, instead, hurried away with Accolti to inquire after the wounded man, and then to her son to take the news to him.

Oliviero was deeply moved at sight of his mother. Comforted a little that Spinelli, if not exactly scratched, was not mortally hurt, he asked what his father had said.

"Nothing!" answered his mother, perforce.

That "nothing" cast a deeper gloom upon all three: such silence, under the circumstances, could be only a transparent mask for acute displeasure. But with the mother's help Accolti persuaded Oliviero to stay with him that evening, that the Senator's anger might have leisure to cool; and when Donna Edvige had gone, he lighted a fire in the study, forced his own room upon his guest, ordered his old housekeeper to work miracles for supper, and then brought out his favorite poets—Leopardi, Victor Hugo, Goethe—reading and translating them until dinner. . . . Accolti thought that he knew the reasons for the duel; and he felt more warmly than ever for Oliviero that day, not only because the boy had shown a very human horror for the blood that had been spilled, but also because he had given a well-merited lesson to one of the many slanderers of innocence. A little justice, every now and then, did not come amiss in this wretched world!

But those ingenuous and heartfelt praises failed to cheer Oliviero. Instead, they made him fiercer still at himself. What an impostor: he, the criminal seducer, allowing himself to be glorified as a champion of Truth and Justice, swindling an undeserved admiration from the most honest of his friends! Even that picturesque outburst about the Cross had made Oliviero a little uneasy, fearing

as thrusts at himself the sallies of the paradoxical Christ Accolti had discovered in the pages of the Gospels.

He replied somewhat evasively but jovially, nevertheless:

"Interpreted in that way, the Gospels turn a trifle socialist on my hands. . . . If my father finds it out . . ."

"The Bible, socialist?" answered Accolti, running glibly on. "Why, the Bible is the one really revolutionary book in the literature of the world! What do the Gospels teach? Here you have it in ten words: a pure soul, a decent character, are worth more than all the kings, judges, scholars, heroes, millionaires in the universe! Start applying that doctrine in earnest and what do you get? An earthquake! The man who gets rich or attains to power is, nine times out of ten, an arrogant and a servile individual, astute and double-faced, treacherous and cruel. Christ let himself be crucified for the privilege of shouting at those respectables every time he catches sight of one from His Cross up there: 'Shame on you, rascal!' That's why all the peoples who ever started reading the Gospels were seized with an epilepsy of revolution, and never got over it—the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, this miserable century of ours that is now drawing its last breath. The seismic center of all our social upheavals is located in that bland, sweet, sublime, and terrible little book. . . ."

"Don't say that out loud, for pity's sake! Otherwise all our acquaintances will be turning pagan again. . . ."

"They're that already, all of them except your mother and us two!" and Accolti laughed. "We have shown our mettle by not turning our backs on persecuted innocence. The rest is chatter. . . ."

"I have blood on my hands!" sighed Oliviero, again seized with an impulse for self-vilification under the lash of undeserved eulogy.

"Well, what of it?" answered Accolti. "Even a prick from a sword may teach us sometimes to respect the truth a little more!"

"No, no! Blood, the sword, never!" And Oliviero shuddered in genuine remorse, and tore himself abruptly away on pretext of needing sleep. It was really a flight from that warm outpouring of affection which he felt he was getting under false pretenses.

But in the sleepless silence of the night, that sense of his own unworthiness which still pursued him divided and subdivided into new feelings of remorse, new shames, which issued one from the other, joined hands, and girt him about on every side. Leave the next day for Belluno? Find himself two days from then among new comrades—officers, soldiers, and horses? Do routine duties with that weight on his conscience? Why, he would lack the courage even to go out of his house and show himself on the streets of Rome! At any cost, even the cost of resignation, he must obtain a leave of absence! But how secure one? His thoughts turned again on his father, and on the silence with which the Senator had received the news of the duel. Would he dare appear in his father's presence again? He fumbled anxiously about in the dark, his thought grasping at this hope and that—propitiations, expiations, good deeds, something that would soften his father's just wrath, and placate his own tortured conscience. Of course! . . . His mother was right: Elena ought to get married: and since he did not have the courage to marry her, since she was so much older than he, he ought to withdraw—he ought to do more than withdraw: he ought to advise her himself to marry, to marry Spinelli! And his father was right too: he ought to ask for a temporary leave, get away the moment the trials would permit, go to Somaliland, Lugh, around the world! But no, that was too easy! He must expiate the evil he had done by winning some difficult and painful commendation. He must go to Eritrea to fight!

At this notion of danger, of sacrifice, of praise, all the generous instincts slumbering under the turbulent passions of his boyhood caught fire; and the fire partly vaporized the remorse, the fear, the shame, that had been

besetting him. He felt relieved all of a sudden, as though he had found at last the thing he had been seeking for twelve hours without knowing what it was. He was no longer afraid of his father! He would go to him in the morning and admit his mistake. He would tell him that he had decided to ask for a furlough and go to Africa! The more he thought of it, the more ardently he became enamored of his plan. He saw himself already in Africa, covered with wounds and glory; best of all—he went to sleep with his conscience clear. He had already expiated his sins, having convinced himself that he had found an expiation!

He rose at seven, impatient to be at home again. Such haste surprised Accolti a little, nor did he warm very enthusiastically to the plans Oliviero had matured in the fever of the night.

"A colonial war?" he said, hesitating. "I'm not so sure that it is just the remedy for the disgust this dying century inspires in all decent people. Anyhow, your father will be able to give you good advice on that point. You are right, however, in deciding to ask for a furlough. After what has happened, it is much better for you to draw apart for a while."

During their interview, however, the Senator scarcely mentioned the duel. He asked simply how and why the dispute had arisen. At a loss for a plausible evasion, Oliviero replied that he had provoked Spinelli because he suspected that his gossip and his intrigues were the real cause of his transfer to Belluno.

The Senator shook his head:

"For the gossip you complain of, Spinelli is not more responsible than anybody else. Everybody in Rome, more or less, has been talking and is still talking. It's the result of the Cavalieri decision, which put you in the wrong. All the people who were right are now taking it out on you. Don't fail to draw the moral: in this life it pays not to be mistaken! . . ."

This was the first time his father had mentioned the

decision to him—and just to tell him that he had made a mistake!

Oliviero thought for a moment. Then he answered, not without a certain candor more ironical than irony would have been:

"Not be mistaken? You mean, that a man must succeed. I failed—but I was not mistaken!"

"It amounts to the same thing, the very same thing! Don't quibble—get the point!" For the Senator was a little annoyed at a distinction that struck him as too subtle. "To change the subject—tell me: are you intending to leave for Belluno this evening?"

Oliviero expounded, in reply, the plans he had made during the night.

"The idea is not bad!" commented the Senator. "Italy should not accept a rôle less important than that of any other nation: Crispi, who sees things big, has understood that. People laugh because he has stamped the imperial crown on our Eritrean coinage. Let them! They are laughing at something they don't understand and ought to be admiring. But Crispi cannot found an empire all by himself, with the country, instead of helping him, listening to Cavalotti! And if the country is to help him, the upper classes must set the example. Apply for your furlough at once! I'll see about getting you a week's leave today, myself. That will excuse you from going to Belluno while your application is pending. Then we'll take up this Africa business in earnest. I like the idea, as I said, but it should be carefully considered. And we'll have to see your mother about it too. . . ."

The talk with his father took a great weight off Oliviero's mind: he had not been scolded; his plans in general were approved; he had escaped Belluno. He had thought of asking his mother to intercede with Elena in Spinelli's favor; but on broaching this subject to her, an uncontrollable shame sealed his lips. The reports from Spinelli were not unfavorable. The Marquis had passed a restless night and was breathing with some difficulty, but

there was no fever. All in all, Oliviero was considering the outlook bright; when just after luncheon a letter from Elena came:

"You have no heart. I have been desperate for twenty-four hours. If you insult me again today by not coming, I will jump off the cliff on the Pincio!"

Not until then did Oliviero remember! In the confusion of the duel and afterwards not only had he forgotten the appointment: he had not even let Elena know the outcome. This time, however, he would go. They had to come to an understanding, and the sooner the better! He was cured of his fancy. He felt sure of himself! It was as though Spinelli's blood had clotted his senses. He would confess the wrong he had done her and his projects for expiating it. He would go to Africa and leave her free to marry a man who was worthy of her and would make her happy.

Nevertheless, as the hour of the appointment approached, he began to shrink from such declarations, which at first had seemed so easy and so necessary to him. A strange terror crept over him; his heart pounded wildly; he felt weak, faint. He could not meet the test! He would run away! To see her again would be useless, painful, dangerous. It was better to say what he had to say in a long letter. . . . But Elena had returned his own thrust. Her threat of the Pincio frightened him as his own of dying in the duel had frightened her. The alternative, nevertheless, was an unspeakable torture that became utterly intolerable during the last moments as he sat waiting in the little parlor, rehearsing again for the thousandth time the decision he would impart to her.

She came in at last, without saying a word, stopped in the middle of the room and stood looking at him, her arms hanging limp at her sides, her hands in her muff, her head slightly bowed, frowning, motionless, silent.

In the sense of his own faults Oliviero lost his bearings,

forgot the speech he had so carefully prepared. He began apologizing before he was accused:

"I was so done up, yesterday!"

"A line, just one line would have been enough! . . . It didn't come!"

"Forgive me, Elena, forgive me! . . . If you only knew! . . ."

"Alone, without word, as though I didn't exist! . . ." Her tone, sorrowful, aggrieved at first, was now angry, bitter, tearful. She kept her head lowered as though to look at him were something too painful to bear. "Yesterday I came here three times. So I thought that you had been hurt! I had to go around from one place to another, maneuvering for news but pretending indifference. For twenty-four hours, just worry and despair!"

"Elena!" cried Oliviero, abashed by her reproofs, moved to tears by her sorrow, frightened by her shattered nerves. He felt he was losing courage to say what it was his duty to say.

He was silent a moment, disoriented. Then, realizing that if he did not speak then and there he never would, but not knowing in his bewilderment where to begin, he dashed upon the conclusion as though in haste to unload an unbearable burden:

"Elena, I am going to Africa!" And he stopped.

At those words, Elena impetuously raised her head and looked at him as though to make certain she had not heard amiss:

"To Africa! . . . You?"

This half-disdainful incredulousness all but dazed Oliviero. He nodded his head timidly in assent. Then he stammered:

"Elena, I have been thinking much of you . . . of your happiness. . . . You ought to get married! . . ."

These fragments of a sentence had been expelled with the greatest difficulty from a rebellious throat. He could not go on. Elena was staring at him with such bitterness

of mute disdain exploding from her grim eyes and her furrowed brow that he fell back speechless, shamefaced, on the divan, curling up as if to offer a smaller target to the outburst he knew was coming. And he did not have to wait for it long. Having paralyzed his vocal cords, forced his eyes to cover, and then surveyed his mortification for a moment, Elena let go. As she spoke she tore at her gloves, her hat, her coat, pulling them off madly, and throwing them to the floor. Her voice was broken with sobs of rage:

"What an actor! What a Jesuit! What a traitor! And you sit there with your eyes in your lap like a schoolgirl? Look me in the face, if you have the courage! But you haven't! You don't dare! Because I could read your deceit in your eyes, impostor! You have had your way and you are tired of me! *Toujours perdrix! Toujours perdrix!* So say you too, poor baby! 'The red-head has done her stint. Now it's the turn of the blonde, or the brunette!' "

And as this storm tripped over itself and broke into sobs, her hands, trembling, had torn the combs and hairpins from her hair and scattered them in a cascade on the floor. Coat and gown had gone the same route, buttons and all. There she stood in petticoat and corset, her beautiful shoulders, her arms tipped with balled fists protruding bare from her undergarments, while a cataract of gorgeous red hair plunged the length of her back and body, giving her the ungirt and flaming splendor of the most graceful of the Furies.

"Wretch! What a vile wretch! I ought to scratch your eyes out. I ought to slap your face! Treating me like a woman you could buy for a plaything with your father's money! Don't deny it! Don't tell another lie. . . ."

And she was in tears and sobs again, as she accompanied her petticoat with light, swift fingers to her feet, stepped dexterously out of it and began tearing at her corset, her words continuing through her tears like a wind sighing through a shower of rain:

"You are wicked and you are heartless! You provoked

and then you killed the one man who loved me a little—and you did it, not from love, but out of meanness; because His Majesty the Sultan"—here a scathing curtsey—"allows no one to peep in on his harem on pain of death! . . . And now that you have killed him, you advise me to marry him! . . . Love! . . . You don't know what love is! Perhaps some day you'll find the woman to make you pay for the harm you have done us all, silly women! I ought to have fathomed you sooner! But I was in love; and women, when they are in love, well . . . we're fools, fools, fools! . . ."

And the corset too was on the floor in the pile of silks and linens which the beautiful slave was tossing in homage at the feet of the cruel Sultan. Elena had understood that Oliviero was trying to break with her; and frightened, desperate, maddened with anguish and love, she was no longer reasoning or thinking. Her one idea was to lay hold on him again, and at once: there was not a minute to waste—to hesitate was to be lost; to let him get free now, was never to have him back again! Cursing, accusing, berating, she still tore at eyelets, hooks, ribbons, with the haste of a desperate love that was substituting action for thought and was offering itself unconditionally.

Oliviero sat dumbfounded at such invectives and at acts so contrary to them: then suddenly he understood, understood how humiliating to her and how tempting to him that desperate offer was! He pitied her, and he loathed himself: but when she accused him of making fools of women, he leapt to his feet to flee. . . . Elena, however, was upon him, embracing his knees, her face down-turned upon her bare arms, the flood of red hair pouring down on either side of her white neck, her shoulders emerging dazzling from a tangle of unbuttoned linen. Her clasp drew tight about him and chained him to her:

"Don't you dare insult me that way! I'll throw myself out of the window if you go away. Curse me, beat me, kill me, but don't go away!"

He went—two hours later, more in love than ever be-

fore, but with a faint remorse tucked away, as it were, in the innermost recess of his heart, a feeling that for a second time he had thrust two inches of cold steel into the Marquis Spinelli's throat.

Science, that same evening, watching at the bedside of the wounded man, caught sight of a new enemy heralded by a fever: pneumonia. Donna Edvige had been going twice a day to ask after the patient. It was noon, Tuesday, when she came home with the bad news, painful to her for Spinelli's sake, but quite as much so because of her son. But to Oliviero it brought sheer dismay. In his pocket was a letter from Elena, which had come just a moment before, all fire, tenderness, impatience, already calling him to another tryst the following day. He was seized by a sudden, almost superstitious terror lest that pneumonia be a divine punishment for his meetings with her, for her letter, for their mutual frivolousness in the face of death. There and then he vowed not to meet that appointment, nor any future one—ever! Yet he felt pledged by what he called the mistake of the day before, and he was held captive, to an extent at least, by his own desire. He shifted back and forth for a whole day in spiritual struggle. Three times he picked up his pen to write a final letter of farewell; and at last, though worried by Wednesday morning's news (Spinelli had had a bad night and was decidedly worse) he yielded, riveting the chain he had been trying to break. But the disgust at himself and at Elena came back stronger the next evening when his mother reported Spinelli in delirium and almost at the point of death. She had placed the patient in the hands of two Sisters of Charity whom she trusted, dispossessing the landlady and a cousin of Spinelli's in Rome, who had been nursing him hitherto. Spinelli, she feared, was breathing his last. With that gentle energy which no one could resist and with that loving kindness which no obstacle could dismay, she was trying to save him, as she was trying to save Susanna. Whereas, Oliviero, in his own eyes! . . .

The next day, Thursday, he obtained his furlough and took off his military uniform: but that change of status weighed on him as a sort of degradation. For three days he had not only been holding aloof from social gatherings, but had been "out of town" even for family friends. Deliberately shunning the drawing-rooms, cut off from all his friends, he felt, in that civilian garb and in the idleness which it symbolized, alone, useless, banished from the world, stirred again into the anonymous herd from which it had been his boyhood dream to emerge by donning the uniform. He was nothing now that he was no longer a soldier! And he waited, alas, all day for some change in Spinelli's condition that would reconcile him a little with the world and with his conscience.

Among his letters that night he found one of those yellow rectangular envelopes, bordered on two sides and along the bottom with little holes equally spaced, which the royal postoffice sold for the sum of four cents. In it a pen of ill-will had written in a disguised hand:

"So the vanishing poison was not enough for you and your harlot! You are turning to the saber now! Oh, you murderer in yellow gloves, you highwayman in silk socks! If you think you can silence on the field of honor all people who are disgusted with you and your whore, you are mistaken: you would have to exterminate all Italy! But I have my eye on you both, on you and on your fancy woman, from down here in Hell where I am waiting for you. God does not pay up on Saturday! Guilt does not go unpunished! You too will end in jail with that strumpet! *Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor!*

"Alberto Cavalieri."

If among the daily flyers of Clio Pandemia one only had betrayed to its twenty-five readers the names of the two duelists and the outcome of their passage at arms, and if all the others had barely alluded to "two well-known gentlemen meeting on the field of honor," the encounter was nevertheless the whispered talk of society and of newspaper men, talk of scant benevolence on the whole. It was

said that Alamanni had challenged Spinelli, because Spinelli had had him "put in quarantine" as Susanna's lover and the suborner of Marietta; that he had entered the fray with a design to kill the inconvenient accuser; that he had celebrated Spinelli's wound by an underworld debauch. But Oliviero did not know that. He stopped short before this peep-hole opened so unexpectedly on public malice, the anonymous letter shaking in his hands, a mist of rage and stupor gathering before his eyes. He crumpled the outrageous script furiously in his fingers, and ran to his study, his fists doubled as if to strike an enemy. Could he not break a mirror, a vase, an armchair, a window-pane, with one solid punch? He had to hurt something, somebody, even himself, since he could not reach the skull of the unnamed coward who had insulted him!

To find some escape from his feelings, he went to see Pietrucci and invited the young man to dinner at a fashionable restaurant, as he had done several times before since the Cavalieri decision. With the exception of Accolti, Pietrucci was the only friend left to Oliviero; and the more disgusted he became with the rest of the world, the greater his pleasure at the earnestness of the young chemist's conversation, the simplicity of his manners, his unselfish enthusiasm for science, the wit with which he could mock the foibles of the academic world. As he studied Pietrucci's happy honest face, he thought: "It must really be so! Study, books, science, make man happier than money does!" Couldn't he too read, study, learn something—do things? To be sure, he did not know that the young man was so cheerful and so serene in just those days not because Science had confided one of Her mysteries to him, but because the chief had finally secured for him that little post on the Food Commission (a thousand lire a year, a fall of manna in the desert—and with it he would buy an overcoat)! Meantime in all this wavering of thoughts, passions, fancies, aspirations, the plan of going to Africa had slipped from Oliviero's mind. If he thought of it at all, it was as of some vague far-off thing.

His father was not surprised at that. He had not taken very seriously either the boy's despair or his sudden yearning for distant lands. When Oliviero told him that he had challenged Spinelli because the man's lies had caused his transfer to Belluno, the Senator had not doubted a moment longer: Castelnuovo was right—there was a woman in it somewhere—the Countess Asterio! Not Spinelli, but the Senator himself, had been responsible for Oliviero's transfer to Belluno. Convinced that the boy would not go to Benadir, Alamanni had hit on this device to separate him from the regiment and from Rome. He went to the Colonel of the regiment and to the Minister of War, explained what had happened between his son, Accolti, and Marietta, and easily obtained their help in hushing the affair and in averting a scandal by the transfer. Nor had he repented: if there had been any mistake, it was in not getting the boy away at once, without giving him a three days' chance to do another foolish thing! Alamanni was very much worried on the other hand as to other consequences of that sword-thrust in the neck. The Commendatore, for some days previous, had shown himself lukewarm, discouraged, repeating that he sensed the operation of forces working upon His Excellency to spoil "that matter." Couldn't the Senator be patient, wait a little longer, not try to force things? Yet he had never explained clearly the reasons for this sudden change of front. Now, however, he was frankly in a panic. If the Marquis Spinelli died, the authorities would be compelled to prosecute Oliviero, the four seconds, the two physicians; and it would surely be necessary to "put that little matter over to the Greek calends," in other words, to a time when the duel too would be forgotten!

He was therefore quite as anxious about Spinelli's wound as Oliviero himself; and he was a little nettled that the man did not make up his mind to get well at a moment when it would have been most convenient for the Senator to have him enjoying the best of health. Twice a day, when she came home, Donna Edvige felt the ques-

tioning eyes of her son and of her husband upon her, both of them begging her, though for very different reasons, to say that the patient was not so very ill, that there was hope. And Donna Edvige did her best to please them. But though Alamanni went back to the Commendatore every day with Donna Edvige's slightly doctored news, the Commendatore shifted and shuffled more and more. And Friday—it was the first of March—he told him frankly that he sensed a misunderstanding in the air: His Excellency had changed his mind; every hint the Commendatore tried brought up against an indifference which he was at a loss to account for—perhaps the two trials, perhaps the gossip about his son, perhaps the duel! Why didn't the Senator go to His Excellency in person and have a talk? For, certainly, with his great prestige, he could clear up many things, and obtain what for the Commendatore, least among the lowly, was impossible.

"This bird is slipping out of my hand," thought Alamanni, taking that sudden attack of modesty with a generous grain of salt. He was convinced—whether rightly or wrongly History would not venture to say—that if a person were in a mood for wasting time about a Ministry, the thing to do was to interview the Minister. For what with the minutes of the audience counted, the cram of visitors at the door, a horde of secretaries and messengers going in and out, the telephone never quiet, then ambassadors, other ministers, people from court, breaking in on the conversation, there was not the time, the privacy, the concentration, the leisurely reflection necessary for transacting serious business. No, to convince a Minister, much better than a good argument presented at an hour prearranged was to have a secretary always at the man's elbow ready to catch the psychological moment on the wing; "the moment, for example" (this Alamanni not only thought, but even said jestingly, though really more in earnest than he appeared to be), "the moment, for example, when His Excellency is putting on his coat to go

to luncheon, and to be rid of the last annoyance of a tiresome morning will always say 'Yes.'"

With no hope that a brief talk of a quarter of an hour, choked into an interview, could remove the obstacles (if they really existed) before which the Commendatore was lowering arms, Alamanni wondered whether that astute official were not trying to send him to His Excellency to hear from him a "No" which he did not dare give himself. So he held off, seeking pretexts for evading the unwelcome advice.

That same day, the Court questioned Signora Cavalieri and Martina. The moment she had, as she said, dragged the truth from Martina, Donna Emilia ran, triumphant, to tell Malaguzzi about it. The lawyer put his hands to his head and cried aloud that Donna Emilia and Martina were crazy: if Martina accused Gaetano, God only could know what Gaetano might say to defend himself and what the consequences would be! But Donna Emilia was so sure of her truth that she stood adamant. And the Law accordingly was somewhat bewildered between Gaetano's charge that his letters had been stolen from him by Giovanna, and the charge of Donna Emilia and Martina that Gaetano had left them deliberately and with malice aforethought in the kitchen. The Court therefore turned two days later to Giovanna and questioned her; but she, to give the stronger lie to the falsehood that she had stolen the letters, saw fit also to deny the truth, namely, that she had received Gaetano into her habitation at improper hours at night. The Law hesitated no longer. The Law bade Giovanna, Gaetano, Martina, appear together in its august presence on Thursday, the seventh day of March, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And that day they came, all three of them, punctually at the hour named.

When Gaetano's charge was read to Giovanna, that curly-headed Hercules in petticoats, an athletic Amazon, fit, one would have thought, to crush in her dusky embrace any one of the mere men of whom she was at once

the admiration and the terror, turned threateningly on Gaetano:

"What, me, your girl? Lover of a caterpillar like you? Why, if I laid as much as a finger on you I'd maim you for life!"

Giovanna was furious, not because Gaetano had accused her of stealing the letters, but because he had told in court and round about the town of his meetings with her at night. The newspapers had picked up the little story, and it was procuring her, all in all, not a little annoyance: her friends were greeting her with gay little smiles—"Now we know, now we know!" Her mistress was cross and the young man in the family was beginning to ogle, and pinch and tickle her. A bricklayer who had been talking of marriage was now talking of breaking off.

But to the degree that Giovanna was decided and truculent in her denials, Gaetano was discouraged and knock-kneed in sustaining his charge. For once in his life he had told the truth, and with what fine profit! No, sir, he believed now more than ever in the power of the lie and in the success of the one who knew how to tell it! For the very reason that he had to confront that brazen liar with the truth, he felt beaten before the fight began. He answered hollow-voiced, craven, sheepish, with a lewd facetiousness, for the sake of saying something, just as though he were lying—and all that because, alas, he knew he was telling the truth!

"And yet that big mole you have on your left breast—I take it, I've seen it with these eyes and touched it with these hands! Show it to the Judge and see who's lying!"

"He found it out from Bettina!" cried the woman, blazing. "I showed it to Bettina! Call her, Your Honor! She's the cook on the second floor!" Then turning to Gaetano: "Of me all you've ever seen is my face, my hands, and my shoes, you liar!"

"Say what you have to say and don't abuse other witnesses!" admonished Justice in Her human form, severely. "You, Donzetti, you heard what she said? What

do you answer? Have you or have you not been this woman's lover?"

"I must have dreamt it!" said Gaetano, after a moment's hesitation, shrugging his shoulders in ironical humility.

"Yes, you dreamt it, you dreamt it!" pressed the woman, quick to profit by the advantage. "And be careful to keep your dreams to yourself, for if you don't . . ."

"No threats! No threats, now! Keep your tongue in its place!" admonished the Judge. But if he was scolding the beautiful curly-head for raising her voice, he was secretly approving her in his heart; whether because between that resolute denial and that half-hearted retort he did not hesitate to recognize in the woman's voice the voice of Truth; or because, if Gaetano really were the victim of his mistress and of Martina, how had he come to lay a false charge against his fiancée? The Law could not admit that he had been frightened and confused by the Inspector —the Law makes only the rascal tremble! Convinced that Gaetano had told a lie, and that he had weakened under the woman's rough-handed rejoinder, the Judge thought that the time had come to tighten the strings a little.

"So you admit then that this woman has not been your mistress and that therefore she could not have stolen your letter?"

He waited the moment a "No" would have filled, and when not even a whispered "No" came from Gaetano's lips to fill it, he said:

"You admit it, then!"

And he turned to Martina:

"Listen, you, repeat to this man what you told me!"

Martina began to speak, but in a friendly, caressing, mawkish voice.

"Gaetano, don't you remember? It was a Thursday evening. Rosa had finished washing the dishes and had gone to bed. We two were talking together alone in the kitchen, like good friends as we have always been; and you told me that you knew the people behind Signora Susanna, and

that if you had listened to them, you could have become rich, but that that wasn't the kind of bread you lived on. . . . And I believe you, because you are an honest man. . . . And you remember—don't you?—a few days afterward you showed me a letter and you said to me: 'It's from Marietta! If our mistress only knew what she says in here!' You are an intelligent young man. I'm sure you remember. . . ."

Martina had invented all those lies that evening to appease Donna Emilia in their last stormy interview, supposing that in a few hours they would go out of her mistress' mind. Donna Emilia, however, had taken her at her word and forced her to repeat them in court, as the exhibit of a truth which she, Donna Emilia, had discovered! But understanding well enough that her lies were loaded with an accusation that would provoke Gaetano to defend himself, and knowing her man besides, she thought she should wheedle him, lead him along with flattery, speak to him like an old friend, in the hope that if she softened the blow he would feel it less and not fly into one of his rages, which she feared more than ever at just that moment because she knew that she was vulnerable.

But she had miscalculated. If Giovanna's violence had felled Gaetano, Martina's hypocritical softness brought him to life again. Brutally he interrupted:

"Look here! What are all these lies you are telling? You're crazy, woman! Why, I never said anything of the kind to you and I never showed any letter to you! Would I ever have trusted you? Everybody knew you were a spy and a tattle-tale! . . ."

"Then how do you explain this woman's accusing you?" asked the Court.

"Ask her that! I know my own business, not other people's. What I know is that Marietta's letter was stolen from me!"

"I found the letter in the kitchen—of that I am sure!" said Martina in a low voice.

"You lie!" answered Gaetano furiously. "You gave me

the letter at five o'clock, when I came back home. I read it in the kitchen, put it in the right-hand pocket of my coat, went to my room, and changed my clothes. I left the coat with the letter in the pocket and went out, locking the door. I was back in my room by eleven and did not come out again. So—I could not have left the letter in the kitchen or lost it there. . . ."

But at this point Martina was on her feet, turning in all assurance upon Gaetano:

"That's a lie! That's a lie! You opened the letter and you read it when you came back from your room with your smock on. I can see you there as you were with your white cap on and the letter unfolded under the gas lamp. . . ."

Feeling sure of herself on this point and supposing that Gaetano was lying for some purpose or other, Martina raised her voice (and her dander) to get even for the previous contradiction, pleased that she had caught her adversary in a hole.

But when Gaetano heard that very definite detail of the white smock and the white cap and the letter outspread under the light, he started, saw for a flash, in a sudden clearing of memory, glimmers that he recognized as real; but the next instant they were gone, as if they had faded. He sat silent a moment, stunned, uncertain whether he had or had not seen them; and at last he stammered, hesitating:

"No . . . it wasn't as you say . . . I don't think it was . . ."

But the sly old woman had noted his hesitation, and she pressed on, gaining confidence with every syllable:

"No? You say no? Deny it if you have the courage! But you haven't. If your memory is serving you badly, I will polish it up for you—mine could not be better! Not only did you read the letter under the light when you came back from your room; but you put it here" (and she slapped her hip) "in the left-hand pocket of your smock. What the letter said, I don't know; but it must

have pleased you; because after you put it in your pocket, you took up a saucepan and whirled it round and round, like this, and you sang: 'Come, little saucepan of my heart! . . .' Did you or didn't you? You can see, Your Honor, whether I am telling the truth. . . . He doesn't answer. . . . He doesn't dare say that I'm not!"

Gaetano, in fact, seemed to have turned to stone. Suddenly he had seen himself again, dressed in the white smock, standing under the lamp with the sheet unfolded in his hands, intently reading, just as Martina said; and then with the saucepan in his hand whirling it round and round, just as Martina said. With those details freshened, his memory came back entire and he perceived the whole chain of misapprehensions of which he had been the victim. But Gaetano also remembered that to go up to Giovanna's he had taken off the white smock and left it in the room, and he had not locked the door, for fear of making a noise! And he saw what had happened: Martina had stolen the letter during his absence!

He sat silent a moment, dazed by that vivid revelation of the truth; then he said, turning to Martina, anxiously:

"Are you sure, really sure, that I put the letter in the pocket of my smock?"

"Why, you know it better than I do, you did!" answered Martina, studying him somewhat distrustfully. That unexpected change of tone had aroused her suspicions.

At this point Gaetano rose slowly to his feet, turned upon Martina, and glowering darkly, cried:

"Now I understand! You were the one who stole the letter from my bedroom!"

"Of course I stole it! Of course I stole it!" sang Martina, affecting an ironical indifference, but avoiding Gaetano's eyes and looking instead at the Judge because her heart was beating in alarm.

"I ought to choke you, you dirty jade!" continued Gaetano. But the Law interrupted here:

"My good man, you are in the chambers of an examin-

ing magistrate, not in your kitchen. . . . Don't forget that! Sit down now and talk to me! What do you mean by all this? Have you at last decided to tell the truth? . . . It's time, in fact!"

Gaetano sat down again.

"Your Honor," he began, "now I understand! It's true! Martina is right! I read the letter in the kitchen when I came back from my room and I put it in the pocket of my smock. I had things mixed up; but now I remember just how it was. That evening when I went to bed, I hung my smock on the hook, leaving the letter in the pocket; and . . ."

But at this point he stopped, faltering. A side glance to his right fell on Giovanna, who was staring at him with eyes that seemed like burning mirrors and were saying, "The Lord help you if you squeal!" Another to the left fell on Martina who sat looking at him half in contempt, half in defiance—"Speak if you have the stomach, and lots of good may it do you!" For all his ignorance of mythology he found himself between Scylla and Charybdis; to explain how things really went and to give the lie to that wench of a Martina, he would have to say that he had left his room to go upstairs to Giovanna's. But could he say that after he had admitted that Giovanna was not his mistress, and under the fire of Giovanna's terrible eyes? . . . Besides, they were lying and he was telling the truth: the duel was not with equal weapons by any means!

"Come, come, let's have it!" pressed the Judge, all ears. To get himself out of the hole Gaetano leapt to the conclusion, clearing all difficulties with both feet.

"This woman came into my bedroom during the night and stole the letter!"

"While you were there, sleeping? Impossible!" objected the Judge, who was not a fool.

Unable to meet the objection, Gaetano made no reply. Instead he drew in his mouth at the corners as if he were trying to swallow a bitter pill that would not go down. But Martina, aware that her hide was in danger, guessed

at once that Gaetano was not saying where he had gone for fear of Giovanna. She took advantage of his predicament to launch an offensive-defensive.

"Your Honor, don't listen to this man! The truth I told you myself! Why, I never set my foot in his room. I couldn't even tell you what it looks like, because he always kept it shut—and it was the Devil to pay if any one went near the place! As though we were all thieves! What great things he kept locked up in there he and the Devil know. I can tell you nothing I haven't told: the letter he read, and then he put it in the pocket of his smock. At half-past eleven I went back to the kitchen to get a little sugar and I found it lying on the table under the light, in full view. If he didn't put it there, the Devil must have done it!"

"You heard that, Donzetti?" said the Judge. "What do you say to it?"

Gaetano could hardly contain himself at seeing them all implacable against him—Giovanna with those two flaming eyes; Martina with that dubious smile of derision; the Judge with those merciless objections. The move he would have chosen would be to fish up, then and there, some lie cleverer than the lies they were telling and make a clean sweep of the two skirts. His mind ran over the many inventions he had designed roughly to defend himself, even in the days when, through that incomprehensible slip in memory, he had had a little respect for truth. He brought up hosts of them, but he was always afraid that if he tossed them out offhand, like that, he would become snarled in contradictions that might carry him who could say where. Ah, that would be a fine one to tell! Should he try it? Should he risk it? It was burning on the tip of his tongue! He hesitated. Yet there sat the Judge nagging at him: two or three times already the Judge had said:

"Well, then, you haven't anything to say? You admit that this woman is telling the truth?"

As deficient in history as in mythology, Gaetano decided to cross the Rubicon:

"Your Honor," he began with sudden resoluteness, "I am going to tell you the truth. Yes, I gave the letter to Martina. For some time this woman had been telling me that the Signora would give me a fine present if I would let her read Marietta's letters. I paid no attention to her; because spies are people I have nothing to do with. But she kept at me. Every time a letter came from Marietta, she was after me again. Well, that Saturday, at last, to get rid of the leech, I gave her the letter. I said: 'Here, take the blamed thing and leave me alone! And go to the Devil, you and your Signora!' But I would never have imagined the letter was to be used to accuse Marietta and me. . . ."

All three of those individuals, though willing to tear each other to pieces, now stood in accord to impose upon the fourth, who incarnated human Justice before their eyes. No one of them, however bitter in accusing a neighbor of the lie, would henceforth let fall even a crumb of truth. Martina began, interrupting Gaetano:

"What a liar! There's not a word of truth in what he says, Judge! May Santa Lucia strike me blind if I am lying. . . . How much did they pay you to tell these stories?"

And how many names they would have called back and forth had Justice not straightway intervened:

"Silence, silence! Let no one speak unless questioned by the Court! Donzetti, you answer! . . ."

Now that all three witnesses had banded together to lie, Justice was certain She was on the point of discovering the truth; indeed She had already glimpsed it, as a sailor, at the end of a long voyage, sights the long-awaited land. Gaetano had given the letter to Martina and to their common mistress—there stood the truth, the simple truth, finally established. All those fairy-tales of thefts, mislayings, findings, did not hold a drop of water. But if

Gaetano had given the letter over, there must lie under that a plot hatched by Signora Cavalieri, Martina, and Gaetano to frame Marietta and get her into jail. The next step, therefore, was to make a supreme effort to wring a confession of the common conspiracy from Gaetano.

The Judge suddenly softened his voice:

"You answer, Donzetti. In your last examination you said that you had accused your fiancée at Headquarters because you were browbeaten by the inspector who questioned you. On that ground, frankly, I am unable to follow you. The Law never frightens any one who has a clear conscience. You don't look to me like a young schoolgirl, to begin to whimper at the first cross word. In fact, you know how to take care of yourself very well! Now, I have a feeling that you seem to be in the mood at just this moment to amend your testimony to accord with the truth. Tell me now: haven't you some emendation to make on that point?"

When Gaetano did not reply at once, the Judge suggested:

"For example: you said the Sorbi woman had tried to make you give certain testimony. Might not this woman here have suggested that you testify to that effect?"

The burning eyes and the derisive smile had changed places. Now Martina was looking at Gaetano with the blazing stare of Giovanna, and Giovanna was watching the tussle between cook and maid with the mocking irony of Martina. But Gaetano was less afraid of Martina's angry eyes than of Giovanna's; and the lies he had just told (not too badly, it seemed to him, to judge from the change in the Court) had taken a weight off his soul. Just the same he hesitated, afraid his lies might not hang together. The Judge guessed his state of mind and sought to reassure him:

"Go on, go on! Don't be afraid! You did perjure yourself for a moment, but you have retracted in time. You have not incurred any criminal responsibility. . . ."

Gaetano perked up:

"I think so—yes!" he said, fairly loud and fairly clear. But at those three half-audible words, Martina was on her feet:

"Your Honor! . . . Your Honor! . . ."

But the Judge's gavel fell with a peremptory whack.

"Silence! . . . Will you or will you not let me do my duty? Here every one will have a chance to be heard, but each one in turn! . . ."

Then, turning to Gaetano again, insinuating, encouraging:

"Now, try to remember exactly! This woman, then, suggested that you testify that Marietta had tried to make you say certain things against your sometime employer, the late Alberto Cavalieri. Did she make any reference to your mistress, Signora Cavalieri? Did she ever tell you that such testimony on your part would please Signora Cavalieri, that the lady would show her gratitude to you?"

"Yes, she did!" replied Gaetano, quite easy in his soul now that his lies were finding credit. But the Judge could see victory near at hand. He followed the scent in full cry:

"Did she promise you money? A sum of money? . . . What sum?"

"She talked of a fine present—nothing definite!" answered Gaetano, after a moment's reflection.

"And for the moment you were tempted, eh? We are all men, alas! We all have our moments of weakness. I understand. That will do!"

Then he turned to Martina:

"And you—what have you to say?"

"I say it's all a damned lie!" began Martina. But the Judge cut her off.

"You deny, of course! A general denial! Very well, we will note your denial. But can you make some particularized rebuttal? Can you cite some specific circumstance in your own defense? I am here to listen to your side of the case."

Victorious now, Justice could soften Her heart. But if Martina was not so sure what a particularized rebuttal or a specific circumstance might be, she understood clearly enough that the wind had changed, that the Court, at first kindly towards Martina and rude to Gaetano, was now caressing Gaetano and mistrusting Martina. She stood perplexed a moment, then she repeated:

"All I have to say is that Gaetano is a big liar."

"Liar yourself!" came Gaetano; and: "Silence, silence!" Justice in Her human form, who turning further upon Martina remarked: "We get the point, we get the point: you stick to your general denial. And we'll have it in the record. . . . Chancellor! The minutes!"

And Justice soon had the long examination compressed into a few terse sentences. Of Giovanna She wrote:

"Questioned, said maid denied categorically that she had intimate relations with Donzetti and that she received him into her room either that night or any other. The man, Donzetti, after heated interchange, admitted truth of witness' declaration and retracted charge of theft of letter."

Of Gaetano She wrote:

"Invited to explain in detail how letter came into hands of Signora Cavalieri, after long hesitation said that he himself had given it to said maid Martina Rubbi, because urgently solicited by her to do so as favor to their mistress.

"To question similarly framed, testified that said maid suggested to him, alleging she had been so charged by her mistress, to accuse said Sorbi woman of attempted subornation of perjury, offering him sum of money, amount not specified."

And of Martina She wrote:

"Said maid, Martina Rubbi, questioned, met above accusations with emphatic but general denial."

And when the affidavits had been assembled and signed, Justice dismissed Her three witnesses, satisfied that She had finally discovered the truth which She had suspected

from the beginning: that Donna Emilia Cavalieri, through her maid, Martina Rubbi, had bribed her cook, Gaetano Donzetti, to accuse Marietta Sorbi of a crime.

CHAPTER VIII

Friday evening, the eighth of March, Donna Edvige returned home with two pieces of news for Oliviero: Spinelli could at last be said to be out of danger; Susanna had arrived in Rome three hours before and was already in the convent of the English sisters.

"I have spent two hours with her," she added. "Poor child! She is far from well, but she is perfectly calm. When Accolti told her how you had fought a duel for her, she wept from sheer joy. . . . She asked me to thank you, but also to beg you please not to expose yourself to any such danger again."

With Spinelli saved, and Susanna admiring in him virtues he would have liked so much to possess, Oliviero felt his spirits rise almost as if he had actually possessed them. All that evening, the next day, and the days following, he lingered on the pleasing reflection that Susanna was thinking of him tenderly, that she was grateful to him for defending her. And this exhilaration, coupled with the sudden relief from worry over the man he had wounded, rekindled his imagined love for the invisible, the intangible, woman, which had been a little obscured in his mind by the storms of the preceding days.

Human passions are concentrated and reënforced, or else they are scattered and weakened, according as they are brought more or less near to their object in space as well as in time. Now that Susanna had come nearer by some few hundreds of miles, now that he was living in the same city a certain number of familiar streets away, Oliviero was loving Susanna again with the same far-

away love now exalted by proximity, and lavishing upon her an imagined homage designed to please not her, but himself, the only one to know of it. Every day he made his mother repeat the conversation she had had with the invalid during her daily visit. Every day he talked with Accolti of the hatred against him in town, coloring the situation till it looked as though Susanna's enemies, now constrained to admit her innocence, were revenging themselves on him for their own mistake. Every day at a certain hour, he would slip secretly away, trying to avoid notice even of the domestics, waving aside his own carriage and the public hacks that offered their services on the street, and going the whole distance afoot. . . . If his father, if his mother, if Accolti, were to know of it! If some one were to see him! The mere thought of such a thing made him blush. And yet he would not stop; he would not turn back, he would keep on, walking, walking, almost at a run, till he reached the lonely street in which Susanna's convent rose among its gardens. And he would roam about outside the building, wondering which was her room, trembling every time a window opened and a woman's face appeared, imagining that it was she, but not daring to go nearer to make sure; rejoicing to contemplate each object that was near her, as though that nearness to her made it a holy thing; daydreaming the thousand generous and impossible madnesses he would commit for her as soon as she was free. In the flame of this amorous intoxication even that self-analysis which had been abasing him in his own eyes was diluted and vaporized. He was throwing his shoulders back, and feeling himself once more, to an extent at least, a brother of the Dioscuri taming their wild horses in the face of Rome! He began to pride himself on the hatred which his world was visiting upon him. Once the perhaps imaginary victim of a general persecution, he was now a hero equally imaginary, martyrizing himself for Innocence and Truth.

But if he went every day to gaze with love-sick eyes at Susanna's retreat, he went three or four times a week to

appointments with Elena at the Trinità dei Monti. That love of the imagination at a distance and this love of the senses in contact seemed able to dwell together in his mind in perfect compatibility, the one pretending not to see the other. In fact, after the duel, his passion and Elena's flared heavenward in exalted transports, which multiplied and prolonged their visits together to the extreme limits of satiety and prudence. They were now meeting at the usual place almost every day and they seemed unable to separate once they were there. In the half-deserted street more than one idle curiosity had begun to take notice, and to watch from neighboring windows the comings and goings of that young gentleman and that fashionably dressed lady who regularly, around four in the afternoon, were entering a certain door a few minutes apart, and coming out again later and later each day. . . . The impetuous capitulation with which Elena had vanquished and reconquered him had intoxicated Oliviero; and the accident which had momentarily put his rival out of the running had allayed all sentiments of jealousy in him. After such a victory he felt himself omnipotent lord over Elena's heart. In the exultation of his passion reborn, he had ceased remembering that Elena too had a right to marry. Forgotten quite the scruples of conscience which at first had been tormenting him! Rather he was showing himself every day more intolerant of the precautions and dissimulations with which Elena was hiding their love, as though these were so many signs of coldness on her part, so many wrongs inflicted on him; and each day he was clamoring for some overt act of imprudence which would be the test of her abandonment. Should they not visit the catacombs or the tombs of the Appian Way together? Should they not go galloping over the Campagna together? Should they not make, together, under an assumed name, a journey to Naples, to Sicily, to Paris? No, he was no longer satisfied that she should be his just once in a while, for a few moments, secretly: he wanted a week, a whole week of her! And Elena seemed

to catch fire at this flame, and to collapse intoxicated in his intoxication. Yes, yes, along the Appian Way and to the catacombs on his arm! Over the Campagna at his side! With him to Naples, to Sicily, to Paris, to the moon, to the planet Mars!

"As you wish! What you wish!" she would murmur in his ear.

But though she seemed to consent to all his caprices in her words, she never lacked reasons or pretexts for not being seen on the Appian Way or in the catacombs, for putting off the ride over the Campagna, for asking time to prepare for their mysterious flight to the ends of the earth. And a surprise was in store for Oliviero to awaken him from this triple dream of happiness. One day Elena confided to him that Donna Edvige had asked her to help in the nursing of Spinelli, and that she, in spite of every effort to squirm out of it, had in the end not been able to refuse.

"If you knew what a bore it is for me," she said with an air of annoyance, gathering from her lover's clouded face that the news had not been received with overmuch pleasure. "I am not the woman to take care of sick people! If it had not been your mother, I would never have agreed. But could I say no to her? Come, stop sulking and be reasonable! In life we cannot always do just what we wish!"

Anything may happen in this world! Elena, at that moment, was the living mouthpiece of truth. Donna Edvige had looked into this matter of Spinelli and the Countess Asterio; and convinced that he was really eager to marry Elena and that he would not make a bad husband for her, she had begun wondering what she could do to persuade Elena not to dismiss such an opportunity too lightly. It had occurred to her that women often grow attached to the patients they nurse. When, accordingly, Spinelli had definitely entered on convalescence, she suggested to Elena that the company of an agreeable person was always the most miraculous of medicines, and begged her

to spend an hour each day at Spinelli's bedside. And it was true—gospel truth—that Elena had hesitated at first. She had not decided to say yes till the very day when she had broached the subject to Oliviero.

History, nevertheless, is obliged to add that the day before that Elena had had a talk with a cousin of hers home on vacation from the diplomatic service in Mexico; and she had asked the man, half jokingly, for the real truth about that aunt the Marquis Spinelli had in Central America and about all those silver mines which she believed had been jestingly discovered by Spinelli's friends in some province of the moon. Instead, it turned out that both aunt and mines existed in reality in Mexico, and taken together made one of the fattest fortunes in that country—several millions a year in income—and it would soon be belonging to the lucky nephew, who was the old lady's only relative. And if History were inclined to believe Chronology which, as every one knows, is one of Her eyes, She would have further to add that Elena had changed her mind and decided to obey Donna Edvige after this talk with her cousin and because of it! But loath to assume responsibility for so pointed a conjecture History will . . . proceed in all haste!

At exactly ten o'clock on Monday, the eleventh of March, Senator Alamanni appeared in the great green antechamber of the President of the Council of Ministers at Palazzo Braschi. Clad in formal black, high hat in hand, he paused at the entrance, gave a swift glance at three unknown persons, silent and thoughtful, who were awaiting their turn, then walked to a corner, sat quietly, very quietly down. Not even after Spinelli's turn for the better had the Commendatore changed his mind. He still clung to the suggestion of the talk with His Excellency. Seeing that for some mysterious reason the Commendatore was unwilling, or perhaps unable, to "give the final push to that little matter," Alamanni had requested an audience on his own behalf. And an unusually fine pretext had come to hand in just those days.

Three years before Alamanni had gone to Moscow to negotiate a big deal in grain, flax, sulphur, and lime with a number of Russian banks (a question of keeping all that traffic for the Mediterranean-Black Sea route), and on that occasion he had been invited to dinner by the Grand Duke Sergius, governor of Moscow. Now it chanced that the Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess had decided to pass the month of May in Rome. So far Senator Alamanni had never succeeded in bagging for his table anything better than some easy mark of a princeling a bit down at the heels. He had accordingly sounded out Their Imperial Highnesses through diplomatic channels to discover whether they would do him the signal honor and the gracious favor of dining in his "modest dwelling." And just in those days Their Imperial Highnesses had let it be known that they deigned to accept the Senator's invitation for the third evening in May.

What a combination of circumstances! Alamanni could now ask an audience with His Excellency in order to invite him to the banquet, and he could urge him then to hurry the title along—not, of course, as a favor to himself personally, but just to enable him to entertain their two Imperial Highnesses in more appropriate style! He had no illusions: it would be a stiff fight—his enemies, as usual, would not be sleeping. But he could join battle in good heart! Had not titles been, all through history, the reward for public services? Well, who had done more for his country than he?

He waited five, ten, fifteen minutes, occupied with such thoughts, gazing abstractedly at the three other visitors who sat like statues waiting, and at the ushers, clad in black rumpled coats, who entered at one door or another, slowly crossed the room, and disappeared. Gradually Alamanni's attention passed from his own concerns to center on the enigmatic peals of electric bells which he heard from time to time, and on those men who came and went without saying a word. And suddenly he became aware that he was in a vast solitude sublime and high, and

immersed in a measureless silence. No ordinary electric bells those that he was hearing! No ordinary footmen those passing before his eyes! No, they were the first mysterious commands and the first silent vehicles of that invisible Will which ruled the destinies of thirty millions of men, radiating in concentric waves from those rooms out to the Alps and to the Three Seas; of that Supreme Power and that Supreme Mystery which for the world lay concealed in that palace and for the inhabitants of that palace in those rooms. And he, Alamanni, was about to be admitted to the presence of that invisible Will: one door only stood between him and it, and that door would open soon! And he would enter not like a timid postulant, cringing, uninitiate, but as a partner in the Mystery coming to exchange values—something for something, as an equal to an equal! . . . How he could savor, as only few could savor, the sublime solitude in which he found himself! This was the top of the world, the height of grandeur, the Pamir of Fortune! And he was one of those few, very privileged individuals who ever succeeded in climbing so high! And in the light of this exhilarating thought his doubts were dissipated. Yes, sometimes he had wavered between the accusations and the apologies, between the blames and the praises, of which this Man of Mystery and Power had been the target for a year past. But he did not doubt any more: a great man, that man—a genius, a leader, the new Bismarck! With him at the helm things went well: there his power sat as solid on its four walls as the battlements of the palace in which he hid and from which he ruled. And the Senator no longer doubted that what he was about to ask would be granted —by an equal to an equal, as a matter of plain justice! He could speak deferentially, yes, but clearly and firmly, if that were necessary. He had made up his mind; and he would be listened to!

A bell rang so loud and so clear that Alamanni felt this time as though it had pronounced his name. "Now for the music!" he thought. And he was not mistaken.

The door at the end of the room opposite him opened. An usher appeared, came up to him, bowed without saying a word, and started back, showing him the way. Alamanni crossed the room with measured tread, but he felt himself straighten up under the gaze of the other three visitors, who sat staring at him. "Ah!" he could hear them thinking, "there's one of your big fellows! He gets in ahead though we were here first! . . ." He entered the corner room which led to the Premier's cabinet; and through the door which the usher held open, he stepped into the presence of Power and Mystery itself. Ho, the Commendatore, who happened to be there by chance and who came forward to meet him, exchange a few words, and withdraw by a side door! But beyond the Commendatore, a little old man with a shining bald pate, who was clambering to his feet behind the big writing-desk under the window at the back of the room. The little old man moved towards him, erect, resolute, almost angry, even if a bit unsteady in his gait, as though he were trying to compensate for the infirmities of age by violence of determination.

"Senator," His Excellency began almost brusquely and in a rather aggressive tone, the moment they were seated in the center of the great room in two armchairs placed face to face for the audience. "I am disgusted with you people in Lombardy! All Milan is conspiring against me. Aristocracy, radicalism, socialism, anarchy, the strangest of bedfellows in a new Lombard League! Frankly, I like the old one better! Do they take me for a Barbarossa come to life again?"

Alamanni had not been expecting such a sally, but he knew the strength of the Opposition in Milan, even among the Fat Purses. He was not at a loss for an answer of deprecation:

"Why, the idea, Your Excellency! You astonish me! Are you not joking? I was in Milan a few weeks ago and I heard nothing but praises for you!"

"Words, words! In words they praise me, but in everything else, opposition! The anarchists have written on

their banners: 'Neither God nor Government.' I rally all honest men to the call: 'With God and King for Country!' Well, how many listen, how many follow? Why, they even accuse me of squandering the public wealth, because our armies are winning! What's the idea at Milan? That Italy should be ashamed of her victories? So long as I am where I am, Italy will never lower her colors—Italy will not turn back. . . . In a few days we shall be in Adua! . . ."

"And Milan will applaud, Your Excellency! Don't you worry over the gabble of a few fools, your enemies and Italy's! Why bother with them when the whole country is glowing from the splendid victories of our arms? If a few financiers are whining at the cost . . ."

"I've thought of that too," the Minister interrupted. "Napoleon made war with the money of the conquered. I'll do as Napoleon did."

"You intend to carry on with the money of the Abyssinians?" exclaimed Alamanni, certain, at the moment, that he must have misunderstood.

"Just so! In Africa we are masters of a rich, populous territory half the size of Italy. It can and it should give us a return. A colony is a farm that earns an income, not a flower garden that costs money! . . ."

This ingenious comparison delivered in a tone of such assurance quieted the banker's fears. At that moment he asked nothing better than to be convinced, especially in view of the impulsive expression of skepticism he had incautiously dropped.

"There you have an idea worthy of a statesman!" he exclaimed emphatically. "I've always said, personally, that you, Excellency, are the one successor to Prince Bismarck we have in Europe. . . ."

"But I can't do everything all by myself. I need to be helped. And instead, everybody is hindering! . . ."

It was the psychological moment. Alamanni did not hesitate:

"Your Excellency, I can well understand your com-

plaining at the ingratitude with which not Italy, but certain men and certain parties in Italy, are repaying you for the good you are doing our country. But permit me one observation: I cannot see why you voice your complaint to me! Insignificant as I may be, I am nevertheless a long-standing and devoted admirer of yours. . . ."

And here was just the point for slipping in the little speech, mixed with its many bows and smiles, which he had prepared to remind His Excellency of the Government's promise to make him a marquis and to request, respectfully, the fulfillment of it. But he had scarcely begun when the Minister interrupted:

"Oh, that? That's already done! It would have been announced before this if you yourself had not asked me, a month or so ago, to hold up the formalities the very day I had discussed the matter with His Majesty. The Commendatore explained your feeling to me! Though I admired your delicacy, Senator, I must tell you frankly that it seemed to me you were splitting hairs. In this office here we pay no attention to the panderers of public or private defamations. In this office we take men for what they are worth. A man like you ought to be above noticing certain kinds of chatter! . . ."

"I am to understand," asked Alamanni, breathless with surprise, "that His Majesty the King has already signified his august consent?"

"The moment I spoke of it! Along towards the end of January or the beginning of February, if I remember correctly, and with much pleasure! For that matter—natural enough! A tribute to you and to your wife. The House of Savoy does not forget the heroes, nor the children and the children's children of the heroes, who have served her loyally! But you didn't know? The Commendatore did not tell you?"

"Well, since that day when I asked him to postpone matters, I have seen the Commendatore only once—that was day before yesterday when I was consulting him about this audience with you. He probably forgot to

mention the subject—as might easily happen. At any rate, I am deeply moved by your words. Believe me, they will stand written indelibly upon my heart! I may have carried my scruples too far. My idea, Excellency, was to avoid creating any difficulties whatsoever for the Government in a situation as critical as the present one. . . ."

The Premier sat silent for a moment, thinking, twirling round and round his thumb a pair of eye-glasses that hung on a long black cord from his neck. Then he resumed:

"My ambition, Senator, would be to provide Italy once more with the aristocracy she needs! We did too much wrecking when we were young—I see that now, myself. Of course, we had to, we had to! The old aristocracy was Bourbon in the South, papal in Rome, Grand Ducal in Tuscany, Austrian in Lombardy, narrow-mindedly Savoyan in Piedmont. Could we stew all those local aristocracies together in the pot of national unity, without first cutting them up a bit? Every day has its particular task: today it's destruction—but only to rebuild tomorrow. That's why I created the Consulta in '87. An aristocracy is as necessary as a religion, even in a democracy; I might even say, especially in a democracy. . . ."

And here His Excellency paused. But Alamanni knew he was a marquis now. He was intoxicated at just that moment, by the place, by the man before him, by everything the man was saying. In that frame of mind, he was ready to find "the coldest of our colds," so an ingenious German philosophy was defining the State in those very days—as that "cold" stood impersonated in the man who sat opposite him and was talking to him, the most marvelous and sublime power in creation. He assented with a respectful bow to the words of the Minister. The latter continued, smiling:

"Anyhow, if there has been a delay we are not responsible for it here! But we'll repair the damage within two or three days—at the first meeting of the Cabinet. Meantime, since it has all resulted in giving me the pleasure of seeing you, I will take advantage of the opportunity to

tell you that I am making you a marquis not to render a service to you, but to render a service to the country. I warn you that the flowery crown will weigh heavily upon your head. The Government will assert its right to demand the greatest sacrifices of you. . . ."

"Agreed! Agreed!" Alamanni hastened to reply. "That's my understanding too, Your Excellency! Here I am at your call and at the country's call with the little I possess and with the very little I am otherwise worth. *Onori—oneri*—the burdens are for the strong—I understand perfectly, Your Excellency. And in thanking you for your kindness in choosing to ennoble my name on that understanding, which is also mine, and not only mine, but my wife's and my son's too, may I ask you to do me the further and the supreme honor of dining at my house on the third of May, with Their Imperial Highnesses, the Grand Duke Sergius and the Grand Duchess Elisabeth of Russia? I hope to show on that occasion, Excellency, that when the decorum of the country is at stake, the new nobility is as willing and as able to do things as the old aristocracy was! . . ."

Alamanni had spoken with warmth sincere because he was happiness itself at just that moment. He had understood at once! The Commendatore had been playing a double game, suggesting to His Excellency that he, Alamanni, was requesting a postponement, and to him, that His Excellency had been obliged to postpone. The Commendatore was really the one to be disturbed by all the uproar about Susanna! But though Alamanni could not imagine at first blush just why the Commendatore had had recourse to such a petty maneuver, he was not at all offended, and he had not betrayed the trick—for three reasons. He knew that it was always dangerous to discredit in the eyes of a chief a subordinate whom that chief will find indispensable. In the second place, the Minister had praised his delicacy in making a request he had never made. In the third place, he was relieved to know that on that pinnacle of the world, on that Pamir of human

grandeurs, the whinings and sneerings of the dirty villagers of the plain which, while he was down there with the rabble, had frightened him for a moment, were not so much as audible! But not even at his present altitude did he forget himself altogether. Yes, the wealthy of his time were able to pay for everything. Therefore they ought to pay for everything. No one could be expected to give something for nothing! He accordingly was perfectly willing to pay even for the supreme recompense of his past deserts—just as he had paid for his puffs in the newspapers, for the love of his women, for the industry of his employees, for the oracles of Justice, for the wisdom of Science, for the masterliness of Art, for the hand of Donna Edvige! But when he paid money, he paid on a business basis—the fair price and no more! When the Premier began hinting gloomily at sacrifices the Government intended to ask of him, he was a little worried lest some definite request pop out of the bag, concerning which, just then and there in those circumstances, he could bargain only at a disadvantage. That was why he had so quickly and so deftly shifted the conversation to the visit of the Grand Duke. The diversion seemed to succeed.

"Dinner in the palace of a Roman prince!" said His Excellency, nodding. "Gorgeous! I accept. Yes, that too counts! The mundane splendor of great families is necessary to the prestige of a State that has its capital in Rome. We have been democratizing too much. We have forgotten how to entertain in the old style—and it's a pity!"

Having obtained just what he desired, Alamanni was impatient to get away with his loot. After those rather disturbing allusions to the price of his crown, the divine dwelling-place of Power and Mystery was beginning to look a little too much like a cave of the Cyclops. He launched a speech of thanks, intending gradually to work it into a preamble to the obsequious deliverance with which he would win His Excellency's permission to retire to safer ground.

"I thank Your Excellency for the great honor you are doing me in accepting this invitation to my humble dwelling . . ."

But he was halted before he had made a fair start:

"And the elections? What will you do for the cause of law and order? Italy, the King, the State, expect sacrifices from all good citizens!"

"I am doing what little I can!" the Senator answered in a modest tone, shrinking in upon himself in instinctive defense, like an insect which folds up at a touch and plays dead. "I have already paid in my contribution. . . ."

"A trifle! Not enough!" replied Power, without gloves. "You represent influence! It is your duty to act! You must go to Milan, Genoa, Turin, get the bankers and the manufacturers together, persuade them to unite around the King and give Italy a Parliament with gumption enough to squeeze a Government from its insides. . . ."

"Well, I'll go! I'll work! . . . I'll talk!" Alamanni hurried the answer, a trifle hurt and not a little worried at the offhand manner in which the Premier spoke of the hundred thousand-lire bills which he had already paid in to the election fund; but at the same time reassured that the talk had hinted not at more money, but at work and influence. The Minister, however, now seemed to be in a chatty mood, and apparently satisfied with the Senator's generic promises began inquiring about certain electoral districts in Lombardy where Alamanni had large factories, about his travels and business connections in Russia, about the Grand Duke Sergius and the new Czar, Nicholas II, finally plunging into a long disquisition of his own on the future of Russia.

Alamanni's nerves were all on edge at having perforce to stand there and listen to that oracle, while his one thought was to escape from the specter he feared. To be sure his terrors grew calmer in proportion as the Premier drifted farther and farther away from his troubles in Italy in the direction of Northern Europe and of Arctic Asia. When he judged that he had allowed His Excellency all

the freedom to wander over the world in search of states to advise that due courtesy required, he seized a good moment to solicit permission in all humbleness not to become guilty of *lèse patria* by wasting the time of the man who was the country's sole hope and sole support.

"I get away with my skin!" he thought as he saw the little old man rise and hold out a hand in the effusive intimacy of comradeship. But in pressing his farewell greeting, the little old man said:

"By the way, you are certainly interested in our new Orphan Asylum!" And he named a certain charity which had been functioning for some years under very distinguished patronage. "We are putting up the building it needs, and we are just a million short! Do you know—I should be immensely pleased if you made us a present of that amount . . . and thank you so much, Marquis!"

"Delighted to do you such a service, Excellency!" Alamanni still had breath to answer as he bowed himself out.

But he went down the stairs of Palazzo Braschi as if the great palace of state were dancing around him in a frenzied whirl, together with all the fortunes of Italy.

"Conquer Abyssinia with the money of the conquered! Do as Napoleon did! Why, that man . . . Rudinì and Sermoneta are right: crazy, crazy! He ought to be locked up!"

About ten days later the Alamannis were sitting alone, at lunch time, at a solitary *agape* without guests or friends, when Senator Alamanni . . . Oh, but Habit is such a tyrannical mistress of men that She seduces even History into the sin of anachronism! Let us rush to the rescue, therefore, and not forget ourselves again: the Marquis Alamanni!

The Marquis Alamanni had heaved a heavy sigh after the audience with His Excellency. He had slept badly and digested worse, invoking the deities of Heaven and the powers of Hell to witness whether that was the way to send to the poorhouse a man who was supporting so many people with his money! Nevertheless he had scraped the

million together somehow (and to get that much together in two days had been an achievement even for a giant of his muscle and stature), and finally resigned himself to becoming a marquis for having built a useless building, after having built so many good ones for the comfort and the profit of his fellow men!

For the mystery of that "unconscionable extortion"—so he called it—had not held long under the searching eye of such wholehearted indignation. The Commendatore had a son, and the son was a promising young architect. And the promising young architect had designed a beautiful building for that particular charity with much praise from those who knew about such things, though with little hope of seeing what he had designed in brick and mortar unless he could find a mere million to defray the costs. Wherefore the fond and resourceful parent had thought of Senator Alamanni as a likely source! Not only had he concealed from Alamanni the fact that His Majesty had consented to grant the title! He had profited by Marietta's arrest and Oliviero's involvement to drag matters along for more than a month, always with that double game in view. He had invented difficulties, waverings, enemy intrigues, in order to get the Senator to the Head of the Government in person; but not till he had persuaded His Excellency to deliver that stab in the back! And he had persuaded His Excellency, naturally, by keeping dark the fact that the person who really wanted the million was the budding Bramante bestowed on him by fate as a son, making the Premier believe, instead, that it was the distinguished patrons of the charity who were so impatient to build. That devil of a Commendatore knew that he, Alamanni, would not be in a position to refuse His Excellency!

"If the Commendatore were not a perfect imbecile," the Marquis thought, "he would have asked me outright for two hundred thousand lire for his son! The boy would then have made more money for himself, and we would have been spared—I, eight hundred thousand lire, and

Italy, an ugly building and another architect! If people would only learn how to be rascals!"

Yet all in all, the most difficult thing in the whole business had been for him to explain to Donna Edvige why he had made a gift of so fat a sum to a charity which Donna Edvige had always refused to have anything to do with. He had not dared tell her what had really happened. Much less had he dared tell her that the million was, after all, the price of the marquisate! He knew that "that incredible fool of a woman" would have been capable of reproving him for accepting the bad bargain instead of renouncing the title. He tried to make the best of it with the remark that His Excellency had begged him to do what he had done as a personal favor; and on that ground, Alamanni had found his hands tied.

"It's a million thrown into the Tiber!" said Donna Edvige with that ironical and disdainful harshness with which she sometimes expressed her disapproval, and in which her husband saw another manifestation of her Satanic pride, which considered itself infallible!

But at any rate, three days after the audience, the Cabinet had given its consent; and four days after that the King had made the Senator a marquis. And now for four days more, to the trumpetings of Fame that shouted the elevation of the "modern Croesus" to the four corners of the globe, the four corners of the globe made answer with the plaudits of that conventional jubilation which pour in upon all the victories of men of power. For four days now the happy millionaire had felt himself lifted in a sort of paradisaical levitation far above the roily quagmire of business in which it seemed to him he had been hitherto wallowing up to his knees. He was not a banker any more—he was the Marquis Alamanni, co-proprietor of a mysterious currency which topped even gold! His joy was so great that the next day he had shown with Oliviero an effusiveness unique rather than extraordinary in his eager life. Slapping the boy on the back, he had cried:

"Now we are marquises!"

Yes, he had really spoken in the plural—he had said "we," as though the title won by him already belonged to his son. For the first time in his life he had shared with another human being a property which belonged to him by right of conquest. But he had spoken that way not in the fictitious generosity of joy, but in that same genial and insatiable egotism which enabled him to love himself even in others. He had been truly ambitious for the title more for his son's sake than for his own; but in desiring it for his son, he had desired it also for himself, since in his son he admired and adored the continuation of his own grandeur. In this duplicate nobility he felt as sure of the future as he was satisfied with the present and with the past. He no longer regretted his son's quarrel with the regiment, nor the incidents that had led up to it, nor the duel, nor Spinelli's wound; because all those things had served his desire, by separating Oliviero from the Army at a single stroke. Such a severance, which he had thought of as a desirable yet difficult and painful thing, was now an accomplished fact. Nor need he be any longer disturbed over the malicious effort in Roman society to destroy Oliviero. The coat-of-arms and the Grand Duke would be puffs of wind well able to dispel not that fleeting cloud alone, but a hurricane on the point of bursting. The day after the reception no one would remember one jot of the whole Susanna affair!

He was, therefore, all bliss that day at knowing himself a marquis and at having to prepare a giant reception for a Grand Duke. In fact, in connection with the reception in question, the new Marquis was submitting to the wisdom of the Marquise reborn a doubt, a grave doubt, which had been tormenting him.

"The list of our guests is complete," he said. "Three hundred and twenty-four names, including Senator Guicciarelli's. He is still in doubt. I can't decide whether to invite him!"

"Oh, don't!" cried Oliviero impulsively, pleased at his

father's hesitation, of which he thought he guessed the reason. But the Marquis continued without paying him any attention, still addressing Donna Edvige:

"Guicciarelli is a genius . . . a world reputation. . . . But he has a coat—an evening coat . . . Well!" and he clasped his two hands, raising his eyes heavenward as if commending himself to the mercy of the All-Highest. "I would be glad to buy him a new suit for the occasion. . . . But I can't imagine how to go about presenting such a man with a black tail-coat, a white tie, and a starched shirt! In certain respects Rome is really a queer place!"

In noticing Guicciarelli's name on the Senate list, Alamanni had thought of that frayed shirt, of that tie which was black for white and white for black, of that spotted antediluvian coat which he had seen his illustrious colleague dragging about at no end of ceremonies and official receptions. And, "Suppose he comes to our show in that get-up!" he wondered, in sudden alarm. In fact he was so alarmed that he quite forgot who Guicciarelli was in his household. He even took it for granted that his wife and son would understand the fix he was in and perhaps stumble on a remedy.

But Donna Edvige answered sharply, almost in heat:

"Oh, the spots on his clothes! . . . I thought you were hesitating because of another kind of spots—the spots on his conscience!"

"Spots on his conscience?" asked Alamanni, sitting up.

"His findings in the Cavalieri case! You had forgotten that?"

"Oh, but that business is all settled!"

"Settled for other people perhaps," replied Donna Edvige easily, "but not for us! We cannot insult Susanna, Accolti, and ourselves by inviting that man here!"

Alamanni reflected for a moment, puzzled. Then he answered, in the same perplexity:

"But we can't do that, darling! I am inviting all the Senators in the Academy. How can I exclude just him? With what excuse, on what pretext?"

"Because he betrayed his trust! Because he has a woman's life on his conscience! Because he is a low, a despicable person!"

That timid and ardent gentleness had suddenly caught fire and in a swift transport of angelic anger was flashing and striking out, harder, more directly, more implacably at every thrust, venting at last the pain that had been locked in her heart for so many weeks. Alamanni sometimes compared Donna Edvige in a rage to an ax ground to a razor's edge—wherever she fell, she cut clean! This time he raised his two arms on high and cried:

"But in God's name—we can't! How can I set myself up in judgment on the courts? I tell you, Guicciarelli is covered by a court decision!"

Donna Edvige replied more disdainfully and positively than before:

"But tell me: are we, or are we not, masters in our own house?"

"We are—and we aren't!" answered Alamanni, writhing painfully in the pinch. "When you have a certain social position, a certain place in the sun, you are held to certain considerations. You can't always take your own opinions for law! You have to take account of the wealth and position of other people. . . ."

"Then," retorted Donna Edvige, "then I don't know what use it is to have money, if we are not free even to choose our own guests!"

"Use? Use? . . . Oh, money has its uses!" shouted Alamanni, turning violently upon his wife. But he checked himself. If a woman was so stupid as not to know of her own accord what use money was, well, why explain, why explain? After repeating the word "use" three times, he fell silent as if no further proof were necessary, and touched the bell for the next course.

Two hours later mother and son sat discussing the stormy scene. Oliviero was gloating over his mother's decisive "No" to that invitation, a "No" that only she could give. And he added:

"If I were in your place, I would serve notice that when that fellow comes in here, you go out! If I could make such a threat myself, I tell you I would make it!"

But his mother replied:

"No, no, that I cannot do! That would not be protest! That would be rebellion. Your father is the head of the house, as your captain is the head of your company. . . . If your captain asked your advice, you would give it to him, wouldn't you—the best advice you could give? But if he didn't take it, would you feel yourself within your rights in not obeying him, in going off on your own account?"

Oliviero thought a moment. Then he said:

"But I am tired, mamma! I'm sick and tired of these people! . . . I want to get away! . . . I want to go to Africa!"

"To Benadir? With Captain Bóttego?" asked Donna Edvige, thinking of the Marquis's old plan.

"No! To Eritrea! To fight!"

The conferring of the marquisate on the family had brought no relief, and the idea of Africa had been coming to the surface in Oliviero's mind for some days past—ever since Spinelli had been out of danger and Elena's daily visits to the convalescent had begun to torment him with jealousy again. Though he too received her visits (and such visits!) the thought that every day she was spending two or three hours alone with the other man in his room was a cross he could hardly bear. Even the thought of Susanna had become a kind of delightful torment or at least a tormenting delight in his mind. He continued to discuss with Accolti his imaginary tribulations in behalf of truth and justice, in the hope that Accolti would discuss them in turn with Susanna. But his conscience reproached him for cheating in such conversa-

tions: he was embezzling, as it were, a recognition he in no way deserved. But the worst of all for him was an admission he had to make to himself: that in his utter disgust with himself and the world, there was one thing he was enjoying more and more every day. . . .

Some weeks before, he had met Castelnuovo by chance in the Piazza Colonna, and the young "King of Rome" had approached him cordially with outstretched hand. It had been a great relief to Oliviero in his solitude to find an old friend. He had lowered his defense, made peace, and the two had walked for hours about town, discussing among other things Oliviero's troubles at the regiment and in society.

"For Heaven's sake," Castelnuovo had finally remarked, "don't become a grouch! That would be the end of everything! That you should prefer to hold off a bit from your old world, I can well understand, and I approve. But your world is not the whole world, bless your heart! There are other circles of simpler, more human, more amusing people. Why don't you come with me some night to my club? . . ."

And he had named a gaming-resort frequented by brokers, bankers, and merchants from out of town, who, in fact, soon came to welcome Oliviero as the son of his father, heir apparent, in other words, of a monarch who ruled over the world in which they lived.

But now, once caught up again in an amusement which he had abandoned under the inspiration of Accolti's noble life, Oliviero was conscious of an almost irresistible impulse to return to the gambling-table each evening after dinner. It came over him at fixed hours, like hunger, sleepiness, or any other of his physical needs. In years past he had never approached the green cloth except in imitation of his friends and to make a show of a boy's recklessness and generosity. But now the play of fortune, precisely because it was a simple, mechanical thing, was a pleasing relief from his torturing thoughts. At table he

could free himself of them without effort; and the respectful courtesy and vulgar admiration of coarse, mediocre people, who were now his only friends, was a soothing balm upon a spirit ulcerated by the poisonous malice of the *beau monde!* As yet he was inwardly ashamed at feeling himself more and more a slave to this low and vulgar consolation.

In these straits of spirit the notion of a flight—enlistment for Africa would indeed be a flight from himself and his torment—frequently returned among his thoughts. He had not spoken of it to his mother as yet, because his father had requested him to wait till later; but since he confided everything to his mother (his love for Elena had been, perforce, the one exception) he could scarcely help transgressing the paternal command that day.

At the moment Donna Edvige was a little surprised by this outburst; and still more so when Oliviero told her that the idea had come to him the night after the duel, that he had spoken of it to his father, and that the latter had approved. But Donna Edvige saw as clearly and as deeply into her son's mind as a pure woman could into such a turbid whirl of passions noble and base alike. She had noticed that, in the weeks past, while the father was in a delirium of joy over the fresh glory of his title, Oliviero had even overlooked the races which in previous years had been his passion. He had been seized with an insatiable appetite for books; and he seemed, finally, beset by a need of talking about Susanna, waiting for her every day to return from her daily visit to the convent, insisting on knowing everything Susanna had said and done, and unable apparently to exhaust such a theme.

Donna Edvige accordingly harbored a secret apprehension which had some basis in fact: that Oliviero might have fallen a little in love with Susanna's misfortune and with Susanna herself, and that the fate of the poor girl was more on his mind than his new title or any other of the joys his father was preparing for him. So instead of

direct resistance to the plan for Africa which seemed to her too impulsive to be serious, she proffered a gentle solace for her boy's inner hurt:

"You are suffering so much, Oliviero, because you are beginning to realize that the world is not made as you imagined it. I know that feeling of despair, because I have felt it myself. It is a terrible moment for us when we open our eyes to reality and discover what lies hidden under the external splendor of the world. But it is a trial we all have to submit to; and you at least are fortunate in being able to feel that your suffering is doing some good to one who is a victim of greater injustice than you. . . ."

"Oh, mamma, no! You are wrong! I can't do anything for any one!" Oliviero had understood his mother, and her remark, thrilling him with a tingling pleasure, had also shamed him grievously before his own conscience.

"I am not wrong," Donna Edvige replied. "If you knew what joy you give that poor girl, just by taking an interest in her! She is so serene, so at peace with herself in her trouble—I have never seen the like in any one! And the credit in part, at least, is yours. You should see how her eyes light up when I tell her all you say and all you do for her! And whenever she thinks of the duel . . ."

The mother had set her hand to a phial of miraculous balm indeed! The boy's heart beat with so lively a joy at the thought of being Susanna's consoler that his disgust with life vanished like magic and Africa sank to the depths of his consciousness.

"Oh," he exclaimed with sincere fervor, "how I would like really to do something for Signora Susanna; but, alas, what can I do but protest, and quite in vain?"

"And does that seem so little to you? Can you be thinking that for a person in trouble quite without fault of her own, the sympathy of others is a negligible thing? But I wish you would think a little of yourself too, and not stay shut up at home all day reading. Why not occupy yourself also with something that will force you to move about and see people—your father's horses, for instance?

Go to Milan, if necessary! Something definite to do is the best remedy for a depression like yours. You would be pleasing Susanna too that way. She is quite worried that you should be so out of sorts with yourself and the world. 'Send him on a fine trip!' she cried yesterday, when I told her you were doing nothing any more but read. And what are you reading, I wonder? None of those silly novels, I hope. . . ."

Quite against his better judgment, and feeling that he was becoming guilty of an indecorum towards Science, the Senate and the Academy of the Lincei, Marquis Alamanni nevertheless cancelled Guicciarelli's name from the list of the guests, in order to keep peace in the family. By this time the world had ceased to exist for him apart from his banquet, his guests, and his preparations for them. Not a day but found him knocking at two or three illustrious portals, in process of inviting all official Olympus to descend to his modest dwelling that evening and make a circle of glory and homage about the grand-ducal couple: the Minister of the Royal Household, His Majesty's Aide-de-camp; the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Minister of War; the President of the Chamber; the President of the Court of Appeals; the Grand Master of the Order of Malta; the Ambassadors of France and of Russia; the Director of the Bank of Italy; the President of the Academy; the President of the Consulta Araldica; the President of the Arcadia. . . . And every day and all day long he consulted with Donna Edvige, with his secretaries, with the majordomo, with the chef, as to etiquette and precedences, as to decorations, as to courses, sauces, seasonings. How many debates, and how earnest, he presided over and led on such subjects! And how many momentous decisions he made, each of which alone was weighty enough to make a man as conscious of his responsibility as he was tremble in his boots! And meanwhile the telegraph was clicking, clicking: Strasbourg, the Rhine, Ostend, Nice, Reims, Bordeaux, Dijon, Macon. . . . All Europe was to be on tiptoe, to search its hen-

coops, plumb its seas, ransack its gardens, rummage its cellars, to assemble livers, salmons, lobsters, oysters, flowers, nectars . . . worthy to grace that banquet of the gods! . . .

CHAPTER IX

Oliviero would have been a little comforted if he could have read inside Malaguzzi's cranium. Malaguzzi was in a paroxysm of disappointment.

The lawyer's exultance over his victory had burned to cinders at the report which had reached him also: Susanna was ill and would never come to trial; the inheritance left by Alberto Cavalieri to his wife would be lost to the Cavalieri family; the price he expected to get for Susanna's head would be reduced to nothing—a mere handful of banknotes. Nor did he hope to make up for this "disaster," as he called it, with the promise Alamanni murmured in his ear that evening in the carriage: Oliviero was now bomb-proof, and the case which he had built up against Marietta was threatening to end in an indictment of Donna Emilia!

For things had now come to this: the examining magistrate had questioned Donna Emilia for more than an hour, asking her whether this and that were true and how she explained certain things, so much so that the fiery old lady had mounted to a rage because she had had to waste an hour to show things which, according to her, any man with an ounce of brains should have known from the start: that Gaetano, namely, was a full-fledged rascal and that he could not have told anything but lies, lies, lies.

But it was worse when the lawyer tried to persuade "that stubborn blockhead" that she had better be on her guard and look to her own hide; because those questionings which she found so silly were paving the way for a criminal charge of slander and malicious prosecution.

Donna Emilia would not listen to reason. She declared that Susanna's illness was another new maneuver of "the other side" which the lawyer had not been able to circumvent; and she averred she was going to "paint a set of barred windows" on the escutcheon of the new marquisate, that she would accuse Oliviero Alamanni of poisoning her son, and his father of having put him up to it to cabbage a portion of the Cavalieri fortune by marrying his son to Alberto's widow!

In a word, she was out of her mind, as the lawyer said; but even out of her mind, she was still his client; and no client of Emanuele Malaguzzi was to get caught in a trap which Emanuele Malaguzzi had set for the adversary!

Malaguzzi knew that the defeat had been prepared for him by the Commendatore and by Alamanni—they had footed Don Michele's bills! But that was only one reason more to show them all that no one could play hide-and-seek with him on his own ground, not even your Marquis Fat Purse, not even your Palazzo Braschi! The artist, who boasted that he never botched a cast in his foundry of judiciary truth, was on the warpath for his prestige, determined to save Donna Emilia in spite of herself, at whatever cost, caring nothing about money and even ready to give his services gratis. But how save that crazy female, who seemed bent on ruining herself? That was the point! Try to frighten the Alamannis, as Donna Emilia intended? Folly itself! They had explained Oliviero's letter! They had just been made marquises! They were under cover! Any accusation that Signora Cavalieri might formulate, even if it were true, would lack that initial judiciary plausibility required for catching the ear of the Law. On the twenty-third of March, a Saturday, Oliviero and Accolti had finally been questioned by the examining magistrate. They had told him what they chose to tell him; and the Judge, after requesting a few explanations of minor importance, had dismissed them with respectful thanks.

For two days, meantime, Donna Edvige had been thinking of Oliviero's plan of enlisting for Africa. She was not a timid mother. In the face of physical dangers—illnesses, horses, mountain climbing, the accidents and the experiments of Oliviero's regiment—she was less excitable than her husband was. "You are an irresponsible creature!" her husband sometimes told her, in irritation at her fatalistic calm. "You have no idea what danger is!" In her own home from the days of her babyhood she had heard so much talk of military things that she considered War almost as a member of the family, even if it had an ugly face. But Africa? No, she was afraid of Africa! She knew, even if rather vaguely, that the Black Continent was a dangerous playground for Europeans, a playground not congenial to every one! And since Oliviero had told her that he had already confided in his father, she made up her mind to talk with the Marquis herself one evening, to learn just what he thought of it.

"Clouds that pass!" replied her husband. "Yes, Oliviero did say something of the kind a month or so ago. But he hasn't brought the subject up again!"

"He did with me, just the other day."

"He did?" replied the father, surprised. He thought a moment. Then, shrugging his shoulders:

"Well, clouds that pass, as I said!"

"But Oliviero told me that you approved of his idea! . . ."

"I wanted to humor him—it was the day after the duel. He thought of going to Africa as a sort of penance. I told him we would think it over, certain it was only a whim. . . . He'll soon forget it again, you'll see!"

"But suppose he were in earnest?"

"In that case I would say no!" answered Alamanni without hesitating. He looked at his wife for a second, half perplexed, as though wondering whether or not to say something he had in mind. Finally, with a smile, half in irony, half in weariness, he said: "Here we are toying with compromising documents, with elections, with Cava-

lotti revelations! Sonnino is bargaining for battalions: Baratieri is asking for reënforcements which no one is sending; and Crispi wants to wage war with the money of the Abyssinians! Just that, he told me so himself a few days ago! No one can see an inch in front of his nose! And meantime, do you know what's in the offing down there? I got it the other day from a friend of mine." (And he named a French banker in his intimacy.) "He got it from his agency at Gibuti." At this point Alamanni lowered his voice, and looked cautiously around. "For this winter's campaign Menelik is getting one hundred thousand rifles together, a hundred thousand, notice. In December he will invade the colony. While I stand here talking to you a caravan of seven hundred camels, loaded with arms and ammunition, is crossing the Sahara in the direction of the Shoa. It's a Frenchman, a man named Chefneux, who is providing this rain of manna for the Emperor of Ethiopia. And down there we have, all told, some five thousand men if we have that many. . . . That's one to twenty! . . ."

"And you know there is such a danger and you keep it to yourself?" cried Donna Edvige.

"But what could I do?" asked her husband, irritated.

"Why, go and tell some one—the Premier, the Minister of War, the King! Warn them! Wake them up! Open their eyes!"

Alamanni looked at Donna Edvige again; then he smiled, half sheepishly.

"And you think they would listen to me? It's easy to see you don't know those fellows! You think an ordinary mortal could tell a Minister of State something that he, in his official capacity, should be expected to know before any one else and better than any one else?"

"If I were in your place I couldn't sleep. . . . If I knew my country were in such danger! . . ."

Alamanni was accustomed, like all men of his stamp, not to trouble himself too much about public calamities when these did not threaten to fall directly on his own

head. He thought the information he had received was probably true; but he was not alarmed, nor did it occur to him to call the Government to account on grounds of carelessness. This Government had always treated him well—it had only recently made him a marquis! The Government did what it could; and if danger there were, he trusted, as any good citizen trusted, in luck, in time, in destiny, in the unexpected, in some ingenious inspiration, in those cursed Italian brains, in short, that always found a way out somehow, somewhere!

But this mood changed the moment the danger touched him, the moment he had reason to fear that Oliviero might be thinking of Africa a little more seriously than he had been supposing, and that the mother, always a more or less romantic soul, might not be looking too unkindly upon such a crazy idea. Then, suddenly, the peril became tremendous. But Alamanni knew also that on certain romantic notions such as the State, the Country, the Public Weal, there was no joking with Donna Edvige. He thought accordingly he should humor her with a few of those winning words of which he was past master:

"When I saw the Premier the other day, I had not yet received the letter from France. Otherwise I would have mentioned it to him. Anyhow, the first time I meet some competent Minister, I will do my duty. That I promise you. Though I have no great hopes—I can tell you that in advance! They are wrong, agreed! But Ministers are Ministers, and neither you nor I are going to make them over. However, things being as they are, would you take the responsibility for advising Oliviero to go to Africa? . . . I wouldn't!"

"Nor would I either! We agree on that!"

"I am glad!" said Alamanni, who was not being diplomatic this time. "But I beg of you: not a word about all this! I don't want to pass for an alarmist, like those chaps of the Opposition. Don't repeat what I have just told you to any one, not even to Oliviero! Young men are like that: if he knew there was danger, he might insist

on going anyhow! When he mentions the matter again, just remind him that now we belong to the nobility. Were a war to break out in Europe, I would be the first to say: 'Go, my boy! A Marquis Alamanni cannot fail in the hour of peril!' But a colonial war? . . . No, that's not his line, nor is it ours. Colonial wars are a dirty business. They should be left to specialists! . . ."

"I'll tell him. But after the banquet you must look after Oliviero a little. Seriously or not, he is thinking of going to Africa! He feels restless here in Rome, in all this unjust ostracism. . . ."

"That's a matter of a few days more, a very, very few!" exclaimed her husband positively. "That banquet will tell people in this town what is what and who is who. Oliviero will be all right again. People who were cutting him up yesterday will change their tune tomorrow. Even if he had done something really serious and not been just a damn fool, two sponges the size of our marquisate and the Grand Duke would wipe the slate clear. . . ."

Oliviero's state of mind improved when he heard that on the first of April Spinelli, now able to sit up, would leave for Bordighera. At last Elena would be freed of those daily visits, which for him were a torture of St. Lawrence! And it really was a relief! Elena herself breathed more easily for several days under that lessening of Oliviero's jealousy. But the interlude was brief. Shortly after Spinelli's departure, quite offhand between one caress and another, as though she were saying something of no importance, Elena announced that she was going away for a week at Sorrento—she felt a little tired from all the excitement she had just been through.

The neuralgic centers of jealousy wander about under the human skin—one can never foresee how a jealous person will react to a situation. He may greet the most innocent touch on the point usually the most calloused with a howl of pain. He may remain unmoved by the roughest pressure on the spot which yesterday was hypersensitive. Through one of those mysterious quirks of his

jealous sensibilities, Oliviero was hurt at this innocent proposal, as at an outrage. He flew into a passion:

"I see! I see! Now that Spinelli has gone, there is nothing to keep you in Rome. Here there is nothing that matters to you, nothing to interest you. So you are going away too! But why to Sorrento? Why not to Bordighera? . . . I am nothing! I count for nothing! I understand what is expected of me! You leave tomorrow for Sorrento. I go to the Minister of War and ask for a commission in Africa! Since no one cares for me in Rome, I'll go down there! . . ."

Though surprised by this sudden flare and a little hurt (but not perhaps without a subtle trace of satisfaction at the impetuous violence of such a senseless outburst—it really was absurd), Elena kept her temper. She did not answer hastily. She did not argue. For the first time she struck at the root of the boy's jealous tantrums with smiling but devastating calm:

"Oliviero, listen to me: are we or are we not two sensible people? Well then, let us talk sense! I give you my word: I have never thought of marrying either Spinelli or any one else. But I am twenty-seven. I am a widow, and really not such a fright as I might be. . . . But suppose it were my concern to find a husband? Would that be a crime? Do you want to marry me, you? I would ask for nothing better, though I know perfectly well what would happen to me a few years hence. . . . But if you don't care to marry me—I have never asked you to, as any other woman would have done, because I love you and prefer not to let you do a stupid thing—can you claim the right to stop me from marrying some other man tomorrow? Do you think it's heaven for a woman to live alone, fighting every day of her life the vulgarity, the insolence, and the lewdness of all you high-and-mighties, who think you have deed and title to my embraces because I have no policeman-husband at my side to shoo you off?"

The dilemma, rising there among their very caresses, was so sharply defined, and it expressed so clearly the

thought that Oliviero was carrying about within himself (wrapped to be sure in ten or twenty thicknesses of conscience), that he fell silent, swallowed his laments for that day at least, and even if a trifle sullen, a trifle grim, turned to another subject.

While, cavorting in the seventh heaven, the Marquis Alamanni was preparing to receive the Grand Duke of Moscow, and while his son was flirting with Despair to do a spite to Love, Gaetano had once more come to grips with that infernal dread of prison-fare which continually tormented him. One day in the dingy inn in the Via Alessandrina, whither he had taken refuge from Casa Cavalieri, a sometime patrolman of the police, long since retired, sought him out in his room. But at the sight of the young man's terrified face, the ex-patrolman smiled and reassured him: no, he was a friend—from Orvieto, too! He had known Gaetano's father, and the family, well. That was why he had come—out of friendship and because they were from the same town! He came to warn him: there was a warrant out for Gaetano's arrest! Gaetano had better make himself scarce, drop out of sight, dodge even Don Michele! Don Michele pretended to be a friend. He was really a detective togged out as a newspaper man! . . .

Gaetano was frightened. Gaetano was desperate. He hadn't a cent to run with, and told the man so. Whereupon the ex-patrolman took him to an out-of-the-way tavern outside the Porta San Sebastiano and shut him up in a room there, coming in, however, almost every night to visit him, and frighten him more and more each time by telling him that the police were looking for him all over Rome.

And cleverly, in a roundabout way, the ex-patrolman began to question him. Hadn't things happened this way and that way? Hadn't he perhaps been jealous of young Alamanni, suspecting, for example, that between Marietta and Oliviero . . . ? Probably he had thought of revenge too. So he had persuaded Marietta to ask for the money

under pretext of marriage, and then he had made Martina believe they were trying to bribe him!

At first Gaetano held off. He distrusted this new friend—though the ex-patrolman came to the rescue frequently and at opportune times with bills of ten, twenty-five, even fifty, lire!

Then the ex-policeman returned to the charge both with repeated assistance and with a new line of argument. Well, after all, taking things at their worst—Gaetano could get out of his fix! He could take refuge abroad. There was the statute of limitations: an exile of five years or so would clear the docket. After that he could come back. A chap with brains would get away in time! On the other hand, he might stay—he might continue to defend himself, as he had been doing. Yes, but then he ought to consider—things might get serious! Donna Emilia would defend herself in her turn. She would accuse him, backed by Martina's testimony and by the foremost lawyers in Rome. He had grown his eye-teeth! Didn't he know yet, at his age, that even in the courts of Justice, it's the rags that get caught in the wind? He was in trouble—not through crookedness, just from carelessness: the usual skirt, and he mad because she had fallen for a dude! A bad fix for any poor devil! Not even God in Three Persons could save him now from a spell in the pen! Why not listen then to some one who meant well by him, a fellow who knew the world and knew the law? Why not turn a trick on the police and on the other side, slipping out of his coat while they held the collar, and getting off with a light sentence which he would not even serve? Because there he would be waiting comfortably for the time to pass, at work in Paris, or maybe in London! There cooks of his experience were worth their weight in gold. They became millionaires. They bought houses, villas, land! Probably he needed a little money to make the get-away! Well, he, the ex-patrolman, would try to be helpful. He could probably interest some charitable person in a reasonable amount!

But this attrition little by little wore Gaetano down. Gaetano was not surprised. He was not angry. He was convinced that in this world the lie is the only thing that can save a man even from a false charge. His concern, simply, was to save himself with the lie that would prove most advantageous! And for a while he racked his brain to find such a lie by himself; but not finding it, he made up his mind to flee, provided his new friend and protector could get him at least a couple of thousand lire. In the end, after many a "no" and many a "perhaps," that was the amount he settled on. Two thousand he must have to cross the Alps—if the ex-patrolman, his friend and a friend of the family, could find that much for him!

At this point Malaguzzi had arrived by the first of April. . . . For all this too was a contrivance of the lawyer's—the recourse he had devised to save Donna Emilia in spite of herself! He would persuade Gaetano to take wing and, when the chef had flown, he would heap all the blame on him! It was in molding and casting that new and decidedly courageous judiciary truth that the lawyer had turned to the ex-patrolman—an outworn nag from Headquarters then on pension whom he had saved from jail in days gone by in an ugly mess involving gambling and the badger game.

In view of Oliviero's outburst, Elena put aside the idea of going to Sorrento; and there was no more argument on the subject between the two lovers. But after that noisy quarrel and the assertion of her right to marry, which Elena had made with such inexorable gentleness, Oliviero had called once more on "Pot-Belly"—his good-natured bank-president—incurred fresh debts, and began sending Elena a gorgeous present every day, on Monday a diamond, on Tuesday a priceless brooch, on Wednesday, best of all, a saddle-horse!

But meantime he was propining a strange concoction of texts, borrowed partly from that philosophy which would make the world over anew, and was denouncing the

marriage of *convenance* among the wealthy as a legal prostitution; partly from certain novels of the day, which portrayed dissoluteness as a sort of heroism, whereby a young man might boast of many mistresses as of so many titles to glory. The boy was trying to convince himself that a rich and handsome young man like himself was endowed with an almost divine right to seduce as many pretty women as he could and to keep them for his playthings as long as they pleased him; and that these women should be grateful to him for saving them, so far as in him lay, from the humiliation of matrimony! Yes, it was true, true! The prostitute who offered herself on the sidewalks was less despicable—because at least she took a risk of infamy—than your so-called "good woman" who sold herself by marriage contract!

One day—it was the day he gave her the horse—Elena had suddenly to listen to a long lecture in which Oliviero set out to prove that a woman who married a man she did not love for worldly considerations or for money was a prostitute, no more, no less. Elena listened patiently, smiling all the while. She offered no rebuttal. But she was not convinced by the strange discourse! She thought he had argued much more to the point in giving her that horse—it was a magnificent Irish hunter! . . .

But lo and behold, while he was stewing and she was basking, each in the warmth of parallel thoughts, the *Mezzogiorno* suddenly came out crying to the four winds that it desired to be the first among the papers of the realm to shed the light of truth on the mystery in the Sorbi woman's case. There was that chef of Signora Cavalieri's, that cook whom an imprudent competitor had lauded as the paragon of proletarian honor! Well, that rascal had been at the bottom of the whole affair and for a cheap motive—revenge! For he had discovered that Marietta Sorbi, while trying to coax him to marry her, was taking money from a gentleman prominent in society, whose name the *Mezzogiorno*, in accord with its well-

known policy of clean news, would not reveal. So the cook had made Signora Cavalieri believe that Marietta was trying to bribe him, hoping that Signora Cavalieri would denounce her to the police, whereupon he would get revenge by supporting the charge. And so it had turned out! But if his plot had seemed to succeed for a moment, it had not long held ground under the sagacious eye of the authorities! Knowing that his own rope was tightening about his neck, the rascal had fled, after confessing the whole truth to a former police official some time retired, who had won the man's confidence as a friend of the family and who had transmitted to the examining magistrate Donzetti's final revelations!

Malaguzzi, in fact, had molded his new judiciary truth with a masterly hand, even obliging Donna Emilia, after a terrible scene, to put up the two thousand lire which Gaetano finally insisted on. The Court, now informed by the ex-patrolman of the fugitive's latest lucubrations, was intent on weighing these word for word, to decide whether they should be accepted as bona fide and the prosecution simplified into a single case against the man Donzetti. But the Court was wavering. On the one hand stood that ambition—the hunter's ambition to come home with a full bag—which besets all prosecutors, to uncover in any affair as many crimes and criminals as possible. On the other stood that very human temptation not to go looking for troubles and cares gratuitously. After all, if the Law felt in duty bound to punish a crime which had not been committed, a single crime and a single criminal might seem to be enough. . . . It was to give a vigorous shove in this latter sense to the Court's irresolution, that the Comte de Barge had agreed to start an uproar in the public squares, but on one condition: that he be allowed to mention Marietta's wealthy protector in terms so vague that no one could recognize the son of the Marquis Alamanni in him!

Oliviero's flash of pleasure at this public recognition

of Marietta's innocence turned instantly to disgust as he read the new slander of which the poor girl was made the victim; and he went into a towering rage when his father, who had learned of this fresh imbroglio from the Commendatore, told him that the socially prominent gentleman who had incurred Gaetano's jealousy was none other than Oliviero himself.

"That cook is crazy!" he shouted. "I have seen Marietta Sorbi just once in my life!"

And unluckily for him the news ran from paper to paper, as though a match had been applied to a set of fireworks already in place. What a display of rockets, pinwheels, fire-showers, bombs! All the papers were out to find the wealthy "sugar-daddy in the case" and each asserted it had succeeded—but each in its own way! One put forward a prominent "Market King" who had got rich on fruits and greens; another, a former employer of Marietta's—"old, but sweet on the ladies"; a third, a Monsignor very well known in the Curia. A Socialist weekly alluded covertly to a Minister of State, and pitilessly analyzed, from the Sorbi data, the moral disintegration of bourgeois society, mourning in Gaetano for the whole proletariat, on which a hypocritical capitalism was trying to impose the medieval *jus primae noctis*, an abuse which the French Revolution fatuously pretended to have canceled forever from the list of human infamies.

After two days of hesitation the Comte de Barge himself came out for the girl's employer, "old, but sweet on the ladies." His paper published a brief skit entitled "The Spring Chicken and the Old Rooster" which, after capering around Marietta with spicy jests, concluded with a poisonous reference to Susanna:

"Well, God makes mistresses and maids, and then He pairs them off!"

This was too much! Beside himself with pain and anger, without hesitation, without pausing to reflect, without any very definite plan and yet ready to do anything, even to administer a thrashing to some one for

the sake of ending this campaign of slander, Oliviero rushed from the house and made for the Comte de Barge's office.

CHAPTER X

He leapt from the carriage and entered the Antrum of Fame with the dash and the expression of an enemy entering an enemy's den, determined to have done with him.

At the head of two flights of stairs he opened a door—it had one hinge broken and was "dressed" in tattered green cloth. He found himself in a little vestibule, bare, dirty, piled high with bundles of dusty newspapers. There, several people were standing about waiting, silently, in front of a table with an empty chair. The usher was absent. The old table and its empty chair seemed to be the two Genii of that Locus, the immobile representatives of the mysterious Will that reigned over the Cave.

"Where is he? Where is the doorman? Who will announce me? I have no time to lose!"

So spake Oliviero's eyes, as they swept the group about in a circle, impatient, imperious. But the table and the empty chair did not wince under his scowl. He would have to stand waiting like the others, but not a little surprised at what he saw.

He had never before set foot within the domains of Clio Quotidiana, though he had read much of the splendorous palaces which that Muse owned in Paris, London, Berlin, New York, Buenos Aires. He had imagined in Rome too that she worked her miracles on velvet carpets within marble walls.

"How long will I have to wait?" he thought, as he surveyed in amazement that filth, that dust, that negligence.

At last, when God willed, and taking his own time about it, the doorman appeared. He listened to the business of the others who were there, haughtily, distractedly, his

ears and eyes roving about the room. His answers were short, rude. It came Oliviero's turn; he stated his business. Instead of answering, the doorman attended to a boy who had just come in with a dinner-pail for a pressman; then, the boy gone, he deigned to notice Oliviero.

"Another flight up!" he said, with a jerk of his head toward the door dressed in the tattered cloth. The "other flight up" came another waiting-room with another doorman as rude as the first. The man swept Oliviero's card with a look of disgust, took it, and then led him into a small room. Four chairs set against the wall and a table covered with dust so thick that one could have written a name on it with a finger-nail seemed somewhat summarily to reconcile this little room with the duty of being furnished. But that was only a matter of form. No one ever sat in the chairs or wrote on the table.

"In this house feather-dusters are as rare as good manners!" thought Oliviero, looking at the dust which covered the table intact. He waited five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, keeping to his feet in fear of the dusty chairs. From below came the continuous droning grind of belts and wheels invisible, rising through the walls of the building and shaking the old masonry up and down. Calmed a little by this monotonous din, a little also by the sheer inertia of waiting, he began to reflect. . . .

There he was! But what for? His coming had been one of those impulses which of late had been tossing him, whirling him, this way and that, like a leaf in the wind. He now could see, though a little late, that that impulse, when he came face to face with the Genius of the Cave, would have to translate itself into something definite, some proposal. What, for instance?

A fine idea to give the Comte de Barge a piece of his mind! But in that room of forced reflection, doubts, hesitancies, fears, began to rise. Might it not injure Susanna, or Marietta? And what would his father say? At times the dull droning rumble of the presses seemed to him the terrible voice of Fame that had been accusing the two

women and was now practicing pianissimo much as a tenor might exercise his vocal cords by singing under his breath. "Look out!" it seemed to be saying. "Don't provoke me, or else I will make myself heard again over the whole globe!"

But a quarter of an hour's wait roused Oliviero's ire anew. His doubts and hesitations vanished. He would see the Comte de Barge and tell him to his face that he was a rascal! He looked for a bell to call the doorman and ask if they had forgotten him. Fortunately, at that moment the man reappeared and first through a vestibule, then through a corridor, led him to a door, which he opened.

"This way, sir!"

Oliviero entered a big room. Across it, facing the door, his back to the wall, a gentleman sat at a massive desk under a portrait of Camillo Cavour. The man was reading sheets of paper and handing them on to a youth who stood at his left. Oliviero advanced to a round table in the center of the room. It was laden with newspapers and magazines, all in confusion. The man continued reading as if no one had entered. Oliviero stopped, wondering. Yes, manners were rarer in fact than feather-dusters in that house! However, taken all in all, this office was not so dirty as the waiting-room outside. The busy gentleman continued reading and handing on his sheets of paper without bothering about his guest. Finally he came to the last sheet. Then he turned to the apprentice:

"How's the third page look?"

"Only so-so!" replied the young man. "We're shy on police news!"

"That's bad, bad!" said the Comte de Barge. "Well, see if you can't clip from the out-of-town papers. If you're stuck, get up something on the Cavalieri case—that always sells out. . . ."

The boy gone, the Comte de Barge turned to Oliviero who stood, glowering, stern, at the center-table. The editor did not rise. He merely motioned towards an expensive leather armchair placed at his right:

"Have a chair, sir!—What can I do for you?" His tone was not discourteous exactly—it was tersely eloquent. "Let's have it quick—my time is precious!" it seemed to say.

But Oliviero was not at all intimidated by the invitation to be brief. Disgusted, piqued, he replied in a leisurely tone with a courteous but studied slowness. He had come to rectify an error which the paper had made in dealing with the Sorbi case. Eventually he came to the money he had given the girl.

"I know, I know! I know all about that!" the Comte de Barge interrupted. And he picked up a paper-cutter and began to work on the letters piled high on the table before him, reading the addresses first.

"Well, if you know, why do you now say that the money came from an old man, her 'sugar-daddy'?"

The Comte de Barge looked up quizzically, the paper-cutter grasped in his right hand, a letter held between thumb and finger in his left.

"What would you have me say? Do you want all Rome to think, rightly or wrongly, that the young Marquis Alamanni has been the lover of a lady's maid, the maid of Susanna Cavalieri to boot? A young man of your position must be himself always, and never step down, even in his scandals! Next time, get yourself caught with a Roman princess and I'll give you the whole third page!"

Oliviero was not stung by this gross irony. Still calm, still master of himself, he continued:

"I came here, as a gentleman to a gentleman, to assure you that that girl is an honorable woman . . ."

"Granted! Convinced! Amen!" said the Comte de Barge.

"And therefore I also came to ask you to be kind enough to publish a statement of mine in which I will put things in their proper light once and for all."

The idea had come to him then and there! It seemed the one that satisfied his desire for truth.

But at this point a boy came running in, unannounced, waving a long sheet of paper—the front page in proof!

The Comte de Barge spread it out full size before him on the table, studied it in silence for some seconds, knitted his brows, shook himself two or three times in irritation, and finally pressed a bell-button.

"Send X—— in here!" he called to the doorman, who had answered promptly. Then he sat there, his eyes glued to the proof, puffing out his cheeks and biting at his lips until X—— appeared. It was as though he had forgotten Oliviero.

He assailed the newcomer impetuously:

"Look, do you call this a headline: *Africa Before the Cabinet?* How many times do I have to tell you that a paper is all in the headlines? Of a thousand readers, will even one read these two columns; and of a thousand that read them, will even one know what it's all about? 'The population of Adua has requested our protection.' 'General Baratieri is authorized to act, with local forces.' And then: 'Adua, not yet occupied, must be protected by native forces, commanded by Italian officers, and without our spending a cent!' Why, I don't understand, myself! Look—across two columns in big letters: ADUA HAILS ITALIAN OCCUPATION! BARATIERI AUTHORIZED TO ACT! There your reader has something! Whether he reads on or not, he gets the idea that we are masters of Adua, that all's well in Africa and in Rome! To be sure it isn't so! But so long as the general public thinks it's so, we're satisfied; especially with these elections on our hands . . . Try and learn something, boy! Take this now, fix it up! And show a little speed!"

The young man went out, and the Comte de Barge again turned to Oliviero, smiling now.

"One of our cubs! We're whipping him into shape. But what a job it is! Everybody nowadays wants to be on a newspaper, as if journalism were the business for anybody provided he can't do anything else. Instead, if there is a trade you have to be born to—believe me, it is the newspaper game! But your born journalist is a rare bird! In my day there were still a few. But to come back to your

matter. . . . You want to declare in my paper that you were the man who gave the money to that woman? Well, no, I won't publish any such statement! I have too high a regard, I have too much admiration, for your father. At just this moment your letter would be a false step. The elections are coming on, don't forget that! We would be giving a good lead to the Opposition, to insinuate that you were the lover, or even the accomplice, of Susanna Cavalieri! Just the thing to start a new scandal with, to attack the Government which has just made your father a marquis . . . Can't you see Cavalotti coming out with another moral question, a new Cornelius Herz affair? No, no, no, my boy! The public is fairly quiet! Let's not wake it up with any more revelations—it's too restless and too nervous, anyhow! People are now practically convinced that your Sorbi woman was in with some old codger or other. Let them think so! What's the harm? Why, they're even beginning to know his name . . ."

And the Comte de Barge snickered complacently.

Oliviero could hardly find words for his loathing and his contempt:

"So that's the way you newspaper men keep the public informed? With your idiotic lies!"

The Comte de Barge had not been accustomed, for some time, to hearing himself called a liar and an idiot; and he would have answered in the proper key had the man before him not been the son of the now Marquis Alamanni. He swallowed the pill, with the reflection that young Alamanni, whom he was seeing for the first time, must really be the insolent fop, tolerated out of regard for his "old man," that several informers had described to him. But he could not overlook such an affront altogether. He answered with a dose of polite banter, in which, unconsciously telling more of the truth than he probably realized, he was mocking himself a little.

"Idiotic lies? Of course, of course! That's just the way we educate the public, just the way, my dear sir! Clericalism? Liberalism? Nationalism? Militarism? African-

ism? Socialism? You take those *isms* seriously? What innocence! Why, sir, in our day there's one school, one doctrine, one party, one *ism*—'bluffism'—and in it we are all friends or all foes. Bluffism! I am a bluffer as is everybody with a few brains. Who is Crispi? The foremost bluffer in Italy! That's why he's Premier today! You too have ambitions, I imagine. Take a piece of sound advice! Turn bluffer! Why, boy, we can't tell the truth, even about an eruption of Vesuvius, or an earthquake at Casamicciola; because we have to say some things the public wants to hear, and other things we want to say ourselves, and still other things our interests compel us to say. . . ."

"I understand!" interrupted Oliviero with all the scorn he could muster. "We waste our time when we look for the serial novel on the back page of a newspaper. A newspaper is itself a novel from the first to the last line—and a dirty novel at that!"

"Just so! And you seem surprised," said the Comte de Barge, smiling. "Don't you know the public wants its daily ration of lies every morning? Once upon a time the priests supplied them. . . . Now it's our job! And between the lies the public forces on us and those we have to force on the public, an editor who told the truth would pass for the biggest liar of all!"

"I suppose that's why you published Senator Guicciarelli's interview!" sneered Oliviero, just to vent his rage.

But the man gazed at him for a second, smiling with crafty complaisance. Then he said, with a wink:

"The Guicciarelli interview! The famous interview! Why, it changed the whole face of the battle and saved the Senator's hide. . . . Do you know, when my nephew brought it to me . . ."

"Pietrucci brought you that interview?" cried Oliviero, half dazed.

"So you know my nephew?" It was the editor's turn to be surprised. "Yes, he brought it to me. He even wrote

it. . . . Well, as I was saying, when I read it the first time, I threw it into the waste-basket. Pietrucci begged, Pietrucci implored. I was inexorable. Suppose I had published it then! A Waterloo! But then came the Senator's decoration from the Czar—and I have a nose for good stuff, you see. Quick as scat, I saw the wind had changed. I say it that shouldn't—but if it hadn't been for me, your Senator Guicciarelli . . . Well, he ought to light a big wax candle to me, as well as to St. Vladimir!"

Oliviero was sick at heart. He could only end the interview:

"To come to the point: will you, or will you not, publish my statement?"

"I have already answered that question!"

"Then I will go to some other paper!"

"Do so, if you think best. . . . But you won't get anywhere . . . at least not with any paper of standing. Oh, some socialist sheet might snap it up. To start an unpleasant rumpus, to discredit law and order, those fellows will publish anything!"

Oliviero rose; but before turning his back, he thought of the conversation he had overheard between master and cub:

"I am interested in the African situation. . . . Might I ask a question? What is going on? You were discussing it just now with that reporter. I didn't understand exactly. . . . Are we in Adua, or are we not?"

The editor shrugged his shoulders:

"We are in Adua, but will we stay there? Crispi says yes. He wants not Adua only, but the rest of Africa down to the Cape of Good Hope and for all I know to the South Pole! But Saracco is a teetotaler; Sonnino has the pip; the African party is out of the grace of God; and the Government doesn't know which end it's standing on. It has decided to compromise: to evacuate Adua, but to 'protect' it, to hold it, that is, with native troops, maintained at native expense but commanded by Italian officers. . . ."

"A fine mess!" cried Oliviero.

"No—bluff!" answered the Comte de Barge. "You are a young man and you still have, God bless you, illusions even about the virginities of ladies' maids. Oh, I understand! You're sore at me because we have been playing a little with the reputation of that girl. . . . Well, forget it, Marchesino, forget it! In this Cavalieri business there are those who have done much worse than I. For example, that cook, Donzetti! They're accusing him. He is even accusing himself. Well, is he guilty?"

"Donzetti? He's innocent?" cried Oliviero, dumbfounded.

"He's as guilty as you are or as I am. The one who ought to go to trial is Signora Cavalieri. She was out to play a dirty trick on you and on your father! Well, will she go to trial? No! To bring her to trial would be to stir up another scandal. You ask me why the cook confessed to a crime which was never committed. That's beyond me! It's one of the usual imbroglios in this police business!"

"One crooked thing on another!" cried Oliviero, throwing restraints to the wind. "And I cannot congratulate you newspapers for your holding the bag."

The editor looked at Oliviero for a moment with a sort of sneering curiosity. Then he said:

"But what gets me is, why you should worry? Here you are, young, handsome, and rich among the rich. You have a title, horses, money, more women than you can attend to! Take a suggestion from me! Enjoy your blessings and don't worry about what the newspapers say, about what the courts do! Where does it affect you? If I had the money you have, my word, I would never open a newspaper!"

Oliviero's impulse was to punch the man's face. Instead, he turned and left the room and the building without a bow. He leapt into his carriage and ordered his man to drive to the Laboratory of Toxicology. He had to talk with Pietrucci at once, tell him what his uncle was saying,

nail the lie on the spot. He saw Pietrucci on the corner of the Via Torino and the Via Nazionale. The young chemist was just returning to work:

"Pietrucci, Pietrucci!" Oliviero called, jumping from the carriage without waiting for it to stop. "I have just seen your uncle, the Comte de Barge! Do you know what he told me? He says it was you who wrote that interview with Senator Guicciarelli. . . ."

He had fired the question at short range, impatient to have Pietrucci's denial, ready to believe his "No" on his word.

But Pietrucci was an honest coward. He could not meet such a flat demand with a brazen lie. He felt as if he had been discovered, unmasked! He stood bewildered, as though confronted by a Lord High Executioner, implacable. Instead of a denial, he sought an excuse:

"Yes," he stammered, "I wrote it . . . That is—I held the pen. . . . Actually . . . it was the Senator . . . he dictated it to me. . . ."

"Did you write it?" shouted Oliviero.

"If you only knew, Alamanni, what a life we lead, we underlings. . . ." Pietrucci was humble, very humble, speaking almost in a whisper, imploring the disdain which towered above him for Heaven's sake not to shout so loud in the middle of a public street. "What a slavery! I didn't want to. The Senator made me. . . . He is my superior!"

But that anger now burst over the fragile dike of its surprise. It thundered forth in a torrent:

"There are things a gentleman does not do for any reason! He would rather kill himself! Pietrucci . . . you have murdered an innocent woman!"

Pietrucci cringed scarlet under the lash. He hesitated a second, then he stammered in pain and in rage at the insult:

"Oh, you can talk, you, with your horses and carriages. . . . But I have to live, here in Rome, on a hundred lire a month; and I have the bad habit of getting

hungry twice a day. . . . I've tried hard to cure it . . . I've never succeeded!"

And he turned and went on his way.

For a moment Oliviero stood there on the sidewalk, as if struck dumb by that sally, not knowing whether to pursue Pietrucci and give him a cuff or to let him go to the devil. He shrugged his shoulders and stepped back into the carriage:

"The rascal! What did he say? If I were a poor devil like him I would be a scoundrel too! True nephew of his uncle!"

And for a moment he thought he had rid himself of uncle and nephew by casting them bodily from the Tarpean Rock of his own contempt. But he could not get them out of his mind. The one had said, "Why should you worry, you who are so rich?" And the other, "Yes, you can talk! You have horses and carriages! . . ." And as he thought it over further, he felt the sting and the rage of blows he had not returned. Why had he not told them both that they were two rascals? Yes, he was rich! But what good was wealth, except to make him the butt of reproaches from a Comte de Barge and a Pietrucci? Because he was rich he could not even call a rascal a rascal!

Wealth! Cursed wealth!

He actually uttered the blasphemy!

"So then it is easier to find the head of a pin in Piazza San Pietro than to find a man of honor on the streets of Rome?" said Accolti, raising his arms above his head. Oliviero had been telling him of his scene with the Comte de Barge. "Listen, Oliviero, they say our earth is a nebula that has cooled. It was once a great volume of gas. The gas became first a liquid and then a solid. Our humanity seems to be taking the opposite road. Once upon a time, before the French Revolution, the world was solid, all stone and rock with mountain peaks and plains, hills and valleys. A hundred years ago, the world began to liquefy all over—fortunes and principles, institutions and doctrines, inter-

ests and traditions, religions and faiths. That is the secret of our times: we are living in a world of bubbles, big bubbles, little bubbles. Put the newspapers among the big bubbles and everything is explained. We are a liquid world on the way to becoming gas. . . ."

He thought a moment; then he said, rising suddenly, picking up a heavy volume from the table and waving it in the air:

"If I were your age, Oliviero, do you know what I would do? I would emigrate. . . . I would go to the United States! . . . It's the one country in the world still habitable for a man who is a man! . . ."

And he gave him the book to read. It had been written by an Englishman to glorify America as the continent of liberty, sincerity, equality, courage, progress. Whether its argument was really convincing, or whether it had convinced him because he was so out of sorts with himself and with his times, Accolti was sure, at that moment, that the man who crossed the Atlantic with heart courageous would find everything he had been seeking in Europe in vain. And he said as much to Oliviero with the fervor of a man who believes in distant things because he has lost hope in those nearer at hand.

But for that very reason, instead of being consoled and encouraged, Oliviero was frightened. So the Comte de Barge was telling the truth: the facts were on his side! Life was just one perennial and reciprocal swindle, and woe to the man who did not know how to cheat! Why had he never noticed it before? He could see it so clearly now! He had been forced to observe in months past that there was no justice in the world. So now he had to observe that there was no truth in the world, anywhere! But he was one of those who did not know how to lie, not even in love, not even with women, not even with Elena. No matter what he did, he would never be a "bluffer"! What then could he do in a world in which only falsehood passed for truth, only the lie triumphed? Who would believe him? With whom could he work? Flight, then! He should

flee, flee, as Accolti advised him to do, flee to a world different because far away, to Africa, America, the moon! If Elena were not tying him to Rome there! If she would only come with him—to the end of the world! Yes, in that case, he would not delay his departure one moment! The universe that evening seemed to him the domain of a mysterious wickedness with a hundred faces—falsehood, injustice, vanity, cruelty, cupidity, selfish violence; they gave no rest to the humble, the honest, the good, the sincere; and since the humble, the honest, the good, the sincere were suffering, he felt rising within him a grim desire to suffer also as a consolation for others and for himself. In suffering himself, he would find some relief from the suffering of others, from Susanna's, for instance, from that of the many, too many, who had "never been able to cure the bad habit of feeling hungry twice a day!" Cursed wealth! Cursed wealth!

"He was out of his head!" the judicious reader may exclaim. And History, for Her part, would assent, but adding that if Oliviero Alamanni was out of his head, it was not altogether on account of the disappointments he had experienced that day.

Institutions are founded each on the other. With the institution of marriage demolished in young Alamanni's mind, all the other institutions went tottering. Marriage was a legalized prostitution based on vanity and greed. That Spinelli was a rival to be feared because of superior attractiveness or charm, Oliviero never dreamed; but Spinelli was, for the moment, richer than he, because he was no longer the heir but the head of a family; Spinelli's marquisate was not of a few days' standing, but came down through the generations. This was what disturbed him. Down, then, with wealth, and down with titles! The books were right in describing wealth and nobility as pests in the world! So, little by little, he became infected with that sullen and despairing rage of the dying century, which hated and cursed all the superiorities which had been venerated in ages gone by: nobility as a privilege, as a

falsification of merit; Wealth as the unchaste daughter of Fraud and the perverse mother of Viciousness; Authority as the violent tool of selfishness, a cesspool of corruption, an imposture of false virtues and false merits.

Yet as such convictions grew they would, at unexpected moments, be crossed and even threatened with reversal by a doubt: what if Castelnuovo, what if the Comte de Barge, were right? Suppose the virtues for which he was torturing himself were after all only clever devices of the strong to hold the weak and unintelligent in subjection? Might he not be a fool not to be enjoying his wealth? In that case, why, in fact, become a "grouch" when all the pleasures of earth, from art to sex, from luxury to love, from horses to women, were his for the taking? Why worry over the harm he might be doing Elena, over her rights to a good marriage? Elena had never betrayed any intention of deserting him! Enjoy her, therefore, till he was tired! Then leave the leavings to Spinelli, while he passed on to other loves, still more difficult, still more entrancing!

But not even this doubt, half pleasurable, half painful, would last. Whenever he thought of Pietrucci's scornful reproach of his wealth, he would think of it in connection with Pietrucci's other pathetic phrase, "I too have the bad habit of feeling hungry twice a day," and he would be touched in spite of himself. He had always felt a certain compassion for poverty: but he had never before come into close personal contact with any one who could be called actually poor. Suddenly to have found one in front of him in flesh and blood and in a person whom he knew and for whom he had a liking, and then, especially, to have mistreated that person—what a terrible thing! Could there really be human beings who had to live a whole month on a sum that scarcely sufficed him for pocket-money?

But while the son was thus struggling with the problems of evil and poverty, or was trying to forget these in love and in wine, the father was soaring in smiling fancy among celestial visions of present and future grandeurs.

He was a marquis with Grand Dukes for guests! Paperhangers and carpenters had invaded Palazzo Alamanni to dress it in festive style, though even on ordinary days it had never seemed exactly out-at-elbows. Boxes, boxes, boxes every day! And not Art alone was in a flurry for the new Marquis! Diplomacy too had her work to do! On the fifteenth of April arrived in Rome a French archbishop, member of the Sacred College and a brilliant Thomist, as celebrated for his learning as for his sharp and ready tongue. As a plain priest at Chambéry thirty years before, the man had been a tutor in Donna Edvige's home. Straightway Alamanni had a big idea: he would combine at his table a Cardinal of the Holy Mother Church and a Minister of State, head of the Italian Government!

He sounded out the ground on both sides. His Excellency replied that since the Cardinal was not a Cardinal of the Curia, the meeting did not seem altogether impossible under certain conditions well worth considering. His Eminence begged for "time to reflect," in other words, for time to sample the reactions "higher up." . . . While waiting for this double "perhaps" to hatch into a double "yes," the new Marquis dreamed and dreamed. Who could say? From his humble table, *inter pocula,* might there not issue that rapprochement between Caesar and Peter which alone could save civilized society from the new invasion of barbarians? An historic evening, perhaps!

But on the twentieth came a cry of alarm from the kitchen. Certain boxes had not arrived. They had left Strasbourg, in due time, but had gone astray in Switzerland. Without them, the chef's dinner would be a mutilated masterpiece like the frieze of the Parthenon! The Marquis was determined that nothing should be lacking to his banquet—neither the Russian Empire, nor the Cardinal of the Holy Mother Church, nor the paté de foie gras with truffles! He set out to find those boxes, and in a single day had given the scent to the Executive Offices of the Adriatic Railways, to the Minister of Public Works, to the Lega-

tion of the King of Italy at Berne; and if the boxes were not found within two days he would appeal to the Stadthalter von Elsass through His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

He thought of everything, foresaw everything, things little and big, the fledgling Marquis! But what a life it was, what a life! Not a minute to breathe, not a minute to rest! All business deferred till "after the Grand Duke went"! Barely time to eat a mouthful or catch a wink of sleep, with one eye open at that! For often, in the middle of the night, Alamanni would awaken with a start: an idea! And then, presto, presto—lamp, pencil, notebook, that the idea might not escape back into the dark from which it sprang! And at every telegram—well, a grip at his heart! A postponement? The engagement canceled? His imagination played over all the possible and conceivable misadventures an active anxiety might imagine: an illness; an accident; a crisis of State; some diplomatic imbroglio.

"If only they don't kill the Czar or declare war before the third of May!"

Donna Edvige worked to help her husband in his preparations for the great banquet; but her mind was more on her son than on the Grand Duke. Oliviero continued to pour out his torments to her along with his readings, his reflections, his new admiration for America, certain new hopes of his—he had studied Accolti's book on the United States and gone on to several others. Donna Edvige did not argue with him. She understood. . . .

She understood that a young man of good and generous soul could not resign himself forever to the evil in the world. Not believing any longer in God, in divine Justice, in another life, in the harmonizing and perfecting of this life, the boy was looking for a Paradise away off somewhere in the distances of space and of time, in North America, or in those future centuries of which the authors of his books talked. But though her son's unbelief was a

great pain to her, she was indulgent toward his passionate exploration of the universe and the future. With all her faith in a Paradise in the next world, she too would have been glad enough to find a Paradise where Justice reigned even in this. What worried her more immediately was what the Marquis would say the day he realized his son's actual state of mind. She had perceived, five years before, at the time of the dispute over Oliviero's military career, that the father loved his son, and dearly, but in a way of his own, after all, lending the boy his own aspirations and ambitions. At that time she had upheld Oliviero, not as a matter of pride in her family's traditions, as Alamanni suspected, but because she felt that, whatever Oliviero's true vocation might be, he would have to find it for himself, even at the risk of a few mistakes. She had never taken much stock in the fulsome glories which Alamanni had tried to accumulate during the years following, that Oliviero might find them some day ready to his hand: nobility, a fine marriage, great business interests, a world rescued from democracy. Even at that moment she was afraid the Marquis might be disappointed in the miraculous powers of the two sponges—nobility and the Grand Duke. After the banquet and its splendors many people probably would forget all that had happened in the months preceding. But would Oliviero himself forget?

Another concern, besides, was gravely on her mind. Donna Edvige was one of the few women of her time and society who never opened her mouth when her husband or her guests of one sex or the other discussed ministers and ministries, governments and governors. She had never aspired to be one of the too many Nymphs Egeria to counsel from Acropolitan drawing-rooms the too numerous Numas of the Third Rome. Since her husband's revelations on the situation in Africa she had reminded him three or four times of his promise to warn the Government, but he had always evaded on the excuse that at just that time he had no leisure to think of public affairs. Donna

Edvige felt as if she were looking at a great house on fire with all its inmates asleep and she unable to scream the alarm!

Oliviero, meantime, was continuing to gamble, make debts, and give presents to Elena. He was even letting himself be dragged by Castelnuovo to one debauch or another, attending, in particular, a banquet given by a rich merchant's son in honor of Sabina, the latest sensational beauty to appear in Rome and start a war of vanity and lust among the gilded youth of the capital. But in the midst of his hatred and disgust for all present things, he was falling more and more in love with America, partly from reading the numerous books written in those days in praise of that Mythical Distance, partly from his talks with Accolti. The latter was flaming with the same enthusiasm, and he embellished the picture of the New World already painted in rosy colors by those apologists with ever gaudier hues. Oliviero discussed these new admirations and hopes with his mother and with Elena. . . . Elena listened, smiled, made here or there a modest and concise objection. But if she never approved, she never opposed him either.

All at once—it was between the fifteenth and the twentieth of April—she seemed to remark a change in her lover and for the better. He was giving her a present every day. He was once more solicitous and attentive as in the first days of his love. He seemed less absorbed in the disdain that was forever invoking the fire of Heaven upon the Sodom and Gomorrah about him.

"He has some idea buzzing in his head!" thought Elena.

On the twentieth, she showed Oliviero, laughing, two letters which she had received from her "suitor." Spinelli was again harping on his still verdant hopes.

"How did you answer him?" asked Oliviero.

"I never answer such letters!" said Elena quietly.

Oliviero thought a moment; then, in an equivocal tone, half in earnest, half joking, as though playfully putting a query with something interesting to follow:

"Tell me, darling! Suppose I should lose all my money —would you love me just the same?"

"Why that question?" asked Elena in her turn, surprised.

"Never mind that—would you?"

"The day you are ruined, I shall begin taking in washing to help you. But, no, I wouldn't make much of a washerwoman! What could I do? Sell flowers? I would sell flowers for you!"

But Oliviero was not joking and changed his tone:

"No, really! The fact is, I don't care to be a millionaire's son any more, living on my father's money. I want to work! I want to go to America!"

"You intend to desert me?" cried Elena.

"No, not desert you! I want you to come with me! . . ."

"To America? With you? Absurd!"

"Not absurd, Elena! Not absurd!" He spoke in half-timorous earnestness. "Listen, I have a proposal to make to you. It is not a sudden idea of mine; I've thought it over carefully. I can not live in this vile place any more. I need a breath of fresher air. I want to go to America! You must come with me . . . but as my wife! . . . I have a plan. . . . I will explain it to you. Out there we will be happy and forget these people who hate us and try to hurt us. It's not only me they hurt! You too have not gone unscathed. . . ."

The idea had been in his head for three days. In one of their customary conversations Accolti had told him, with an enthusiasm that only Accolti could feel when he was in the mood for admiring things, that for a quarter of a century past the farmers of the Eastern States of the American Union had been abandoning their old sites and emigrating westward, where they could buy more fertile land for very little money. It was a life wild and civilized at the same time, free yet grounded in a solid legal order, industrious yet full of sane diversions! And it was attracting many young men of wealth from the opulent cities of the East. A new nation, young, fresh,

vigorous, simple, was coming into being out there, to the shame of a decrepit Europe and as an example for her.

It was madness: but a man in the throes of conflicting passions easily loses that light of intellect which serves to discern the reasonable and the absurd, the possible and the impossible. Thinking over his talk with Accolti one day, it suddenly occurred to him that he had found the solution which he had never before been able to find: he could go to America, capitalize his knowledge of horses, become a great breeder in that free youthful continent not governed as Europe was by aged rascals, shrewd and malicious! Elena could not follow him to Africa, but she could to the United States! There without a word to any one they would be married. Marriage with her in America, after leaving Europe forever, did not give him that feeling of shame which seized him whenever he imagined his friends, his parents, and especially Susanna, hearing of his marriage to Elena. It was as if anything that happened at such a distance might be a matter of indifference to those who stayed behind! But if this idea at first, by bringing all his warring desires into accord, seemed to cut the Gordian knot, a grave doubt occurred to him in the days that followed. What would Elena say? Now it seemed to him that she would say "yes" with a rush, now that she would not listen to it. For three days he had hesitated before touching a match to the powder.

But Elena stared at him blankly, as though not quite sure that she had heard aright:

"Marry? You want to marry me?"

". . . and go away with you to a freer, saner, juster world!"

Elena sat silent for a second.

"But . . . but . . . your parents?"

Oliviero understood: "You are not of an age to marry without their consent—they will not consent!" He replied vigorously:

"I have thought of that too. We do not say anything

to any one. I go out alone; you join me by the next steamer; and the moment you arrive, we get married! Luckily that's a free country. A man and a woman who love each other can marry without asking Tom, Dick, and Harry!"

Elena gazed at him. Then, instead of answering, she opened wide her arms and clasped him to her in a furious impulse of self-surrender, as if putting herself utterly in his hands.

Blissful at the consent he had wrung from her, Oliviero raved for two hours in a lyrical dream, doing all the talking himself. He had to leave Rome, make a change in his manner of living. Had she not consented, he would have had the proud courage to tear himself away from her forever. He would have gone to Africa, to Eritrea, as an officer, to fight in the war.

"Just where we shall go over there, I don't know yet. We'll decide in New York. Somewhere in the Far West we'll find good land, not too far from a railroad and a city. We'll look around a bit before we choose. And there we'll live like well-to-do farmers in one of those wooden houses they have out there, plain but comfortable and large . . ."

History is constrained to opine that when Oliviero came down to details in all these plans, his information about America was rather vague and sketchy. He tended to confuse the two hemispheres, the prairies and ranches of the North with the pampas and the *estancias* of the South. He was inviting Elena to follow him to a land somewhat out of time and space, with confines and boundaries mostly the work of his imagination. And Elena, for her part, far from knowing where the "Far West" was, would probably have been incapable of finding the United States on a map of the world. Love is not Science; and when He is happy He does not play the hair-splitting schoolmaster—the rough guess will do. Elena and Oliviero were satisfied to be agreed on a plan to get married, it mattered little where.

The boy was so cheered by Elena's "yes," that for four days he lived among the preparations for the banquet at home without seeing them. He was not lifted to the clouds when he heard that His Eminence and His Excellency, after many "buts" and "ifs," had both accepted. But all the while he had to deal with a very annoying reflection: after the banquet he must tell his parents of his plan for going to America! He would even have to ask his father for money to buy the land!

When they met again, four days later, it was Elena who artfully and sweetly invited Oliviero to be a little more specific in his plans—where would he get his funds, for example? Oliviero, a little annoyed, sought to appease her on this and other points by talking in terms as precise as he could conceive; but he succeeded without quite succeeding. . . . After listening intently for a time Elena remarked, half in jest, half worried:

"Oh, but to give up your palace in Rome. . . . And for a wooden house lost in a desert. . . . An original idea, no doubt of that! It would not occur to everybody!"

"I found it natural enough! Is it so strange a young man should get bored with living in idleness among the idle?"

"Idle?! We so-called idlers are on the move from morning till night! . . ."

"Yes, amusing yourselves! . . ."

"No . . . spending our money! But people who do nothing but spend money are as necessary as people who do nothing but make it! Otherwise the world would lose its balance! The trouble is—I realize that often we do not know how to spend it well. But one does what one can! Now one would have thought that in your family, after two generations of money-makers, and clever ones, it was time for a money-spender! . . ."

"But I am not going to America to make money. If I wanted money, I'd stay here! I am going away because I refuse to settle like a fly on my father's wealth. We are altogether too rich!"

Elena looked at him a moment:

"But one of these days, wherever you are, in America, in Europe or on the planet Mars, all this wealth which you now refuse will be yours anyhow. . . ."

"When that day comes, I will give it away to some one who needs it more than I do!"

"Fortunately that day is not so near!" And Elena smiled a trifle banteringly. "You have time to think the matter over."

Oliviero flared up:

"Oh, I see! I'm a baby with a baby's ideas! I'm not to be taken seriously! I don't mean it when I tell you I'm ashamed of my father's wealth! . . . Well, come to America, and you'll see whether I'm joking or in earnest."

"Please, Oliviero, don't misunderstand! I'm not doubting you or your earnestness! Would I follow you to the end of the world, if I did? But I'd like to be sure at least that you'll find out there what you think is there. I can understand your feeling about Rome. It's not a Paradise even for me—you know that! But will we find people any better in the place where we are going?"

"We'll find a people young, free, strong, simple. . . ."

"But judging by the samples they send over here to Rome . . ."

"In Rome we see only rich Americans—the part of society that counts least, even out there."

Elena did not insist. But after that talk, Oliviero relapsed into his restlessness. In Elena's objections he could detect a trace of hesitation; and not so very certain of his own plans he was afraid that some one else might easily prove to him that they were what in fact they were: incoherent and strange. Had he ever, really, seriously, thought of renouncing his wealth? He had said so that day in an effort to be consistent, but his words had surely surpassed his intention.

When they met again three days from then, Oliviero told Elena flatly that he would speak to his father the day after the banquet.

"Why so much haste?" asked Elena. "Wouldn't it be better to wait, and prepare the ground a little—talk it over with your mother first and convince her? Then your mother could speak to your father!"

"I can't stand it here! I am sick of it, absolutely sick of it!"

"I know, I know. But you have to be practical too. Suppose your father, taken by surprise in that way, should say no!"

"I'll go just the same!"

"And the money?"

"If my father refuses to help me, I'll manage by myself. I can surely scrape fifty thousand or so together. That will be enough to begin with. We'll start in a small way, and grow as we get on. . . ."

Elena looked at him without speaking.

"You don't agree?" he asked, desperate.

"I don't understand such things. I am trusting in you blindly. If you think it best to do as you say, I am satisfied. To be with you I am ready to leap off a precipice. But reasoning with my poor little goose's brain, I would say that it would be a mistake to hurry matters. . . . I am thinking of you, understand! You cannot desert your parents and go off to America, like that, from one day to the other, just because you are sick, absolutely sick, of Rome. Your father and your mother will raise objections. You can't refuse to meet those objections and go away without trying to convince them both. I am afraid that will not be so easy; but if you fail, do what seems right to you! You are no longer a boy under age!"

She had spoken common sense. But Oliviero was tired and irritable. He burst into a diatribe against common sense:

"I see, I understand! You're afraid. You have changed your mind. You prefer to stay here in Rome where my enemies can pay court to you. No one cares! No one has stood by me in this trial! . . . Well, I don't care either! If you won't come to America, stay here in Rome

and look for your happiness here. But in that case, I am going to Africa, and I hope a bullet will free you all, very soon, even of the annoyance of remembering me!"

Elena, however, had something besides words to calm him with; and she took oath moreover, solemn oath, that she would leave for America when he gave the word, some time in the month of June; and indeed, that the moment she reached home, she would set to work on secret preparations for the departure, or for the elopement, whichever it might be.

They met again on the second of May, the day before the banquet. Oliviero was restless and wore a dark face. His father had served him that morning with a long talk, or more exactly with an hour's sermon: Oliviero must remember—the banquet was an opportunity and it would never come back—a chance to reconcile himself with society! He would be complimented, toasted, congratulated, by people who in the months past had been flaying him to the bone. He must accept their advances as a tacit retraction, and smile most sweetly on those who had treated him worst. Forgive and forget—such his watchword! To get the best of this world you never took it head on; but to avoid taking it head on, you had to learn to close an eye now and then and sometimes two eyes. You had to learn to conquer the most justified resentments. . . .

"I understand! All right!" Oliviero had answered simply, because he had not dared to answer that he was intending to flee the world with which his father was so anxious to reconcile him. Now he was angry with himself for having been such a coward. Yes, he was a coward, nothing else!

But Elena was as calm and as smiling as usual, though a little more subdued than usual. They talked at great length of the banquet. Elena had been invited, but she could not go (and she regretted it) because she was still in mourning. She insisted, in compensation, that Oliviero describe the preparations in detail. And he obeyed, though a little annoyed that she should prefer

to talk of the banquet rather than of their approaching flight. Indeed, she seemed to avoid this subject every time he tried to lead the conversation back upon it.

When they came to the parting Elena kissed him and said:

"Drive away your sad thoughts, Oliviero! Tomorrow evening you must be happy. It is your father's triumph. It is the great day for your family! . . ."

"Triumphs and great days come from doing something, not from eating and kowtowing. I'm afraid I shall be greatly bored. If only you were to be there! These formal things are so stupid. . . ."

"Never mind! Never mind!" Elena answered. "They are always interesting! Some day, Oliviero, when you are an old man, you will remember tomorrow evening—with joy and with pride."

And she went out.

Oliviero as usual loitered about the little apartment for some minutes to give her time to get away. Entering the bedroom by chance, he noticed something lying neatly folded on an empty chair. It was a veil. Surprised, he picked it up, examined it, observed that it was torn in two places. He handled it a moment.

And then came a flash of recognition!

It was the veil she had worn at Solcio; the accomplice veil that had revealed to them both their love of each other.

He gazed at it with tears in his eyes. How his heart had leapt on that divine evening!

He kissed it, folded it up again and laid it back on the chair.

But all of a sudden he asked himself:

"How ever did it come to be here?"

CHAPTER XI

The guests arrived early that evening at the Alamanni palace, with that eager and deferential anticipation with which common mortals preceded sovereigns and princes of the blood at mundane assemblies in those far-away days when sovereigns and princes were still abundant and could still dazzle. At half-past seven the drawing-room was filled with people seated or standing—the ladies décolletée, bejeweled, and somewhat encumbered in movement by their long trains; the men in evening clothes or in uniforms bristling with ivory crosses and silver stars and decked with scarfs and ribbons, red, green, blue, yellow, orange, till a glance around caught as it were the flash of a rainbow. There were about fifty guests for the dinner. The Premier was to arrive at a quarter to eight; the Cardinal at eight; the Grand Duke at ten minutes after eight.

The Russian lion was the sole topic of conversation meanwhile. In one group sat an oldish Roman princess, squat, fat, noted for her lack of familiarity with letters.

"He doesn't put up with any nonsense!" she exclaimed. "When there is a strike or a demonstration, he calls out the troops and shoots!"

"And what about the Jews?" rejoined a man who wore the collar of the Annunziata. "It took him only a few months to get them out of Moscow—men, women, and children, more than a hundred thousand! How many died of starvation and exposure we shall never know!"

"Holy Russia, Orthodox Russia, is striving to fulfill her historic mission! We Occidentals have lost our faith. We can not understand certain cruelties!" Thus opined a little old Senator from the Academy of the Lincei.

In another group a satrap of the Consulta Araldica was saying:

"He runs amuck the moment he smells a Liberal or a Socialist—and he spares no one. He sends them all to

Siberia—professors, bankers, even princes of the imperial household."

"What is a *nagaika*, exactly?" a lady asked of the Minister of War.

"It's a sort of limber, pliable club leaded on the point!" explained the Minister amiably. "The Cossacks use it in handling crowds. And it works, they tell me!"

In the group of the Roman princess, a lady took advantage of a pause:

"And who is this French Cardinal?"

"A celebrated Thomist!" answered a Senator, member of the Lincei and correspondent of the Institute of France.

But whether because every one knew too well what a Thomist was, or because the leaded *nagaika* was more pertinent to the occasion, the theme suggested had no success. The talk reverted to the Nero of the North, to his Cossacks and his shambles.

The Marquis Alamanni was fluttering from one group to another, smiling at every one, stopping for a word with that one or this one, keeping an eye on the coming and going of the servants, on the tick-tock of the clock, on the door through which the guests had entered; as though through it now there might stalk at any moment some ugly surprise: a matter of State might detain the Premier; His Eminence might sprain an ankle; the Grand Duchess might catch a cold! The machinations of Fate are at times so dark and so disconcerting!

Taller and slenderer than usual in a low-cut gown of blue satin; a little embarrassed, as she always felt in spite of so many years of social life, from the exposure of her bare arms and shoulders (in those days ladies reserved the extreme décolletage for ultra-formal evenings and for the eyes of a select circle of friends), her throat armored in a six-strand choker of great pearls, her hair, her ears, her arms, her hands, sparkling with the heavenly freshness of sapphires, Donna Edvige was smiling upon her guests and talking to them. She too was thinking of the great personages to arrive, but for a reason of her own. "Your

husband is silent! You, therefore, must speak!" So commanded Conscience! But Humility was in rebellion! Would she be able to explain? Was she not usurping another's function?

At a quarter to eight a servant approached the Marquis and whispered a word in his ear. Alamanni drew a first sigh of relief, motioned to Oliviero and went out, followed by his son. Out there in the great vestibule was a personage he would greet with the most obsequious attentiveness—no longer the lunatic "fit to be locked up" of a few weeks before, but the second Cavour, the Italian Bismarck.

The Prime Minister appeared in the anteroom, high hat in hand, his bald head shining, the little collar of the Annunziata on his breast, and in his demeanor that note of vigorous decision which seemed designed to exorcise the infirmities of age. He acknowledged Alamanni's homage with a cordial handshake and "My congratulations!" And as the Marquis presented Oliviero:

"You will continue your father's and your mother's tradition, my boy! Lineage is a great thing! *Noblesse oblige!*"

And he advanced to the great hall, walking between the two, as though leading the way.

A hush fell over the room. The Premier was the first of the guests of honor. He traversed that deferential silence to Donna Edvige's side, kissed her hand, pronounced a few stock phrases; then, as the guests approached, some in solicitous haste, others more slowly, to pay their homage to Power, he glanced about among them to single out his ministers for a greeting. As such formalities ended, conversation began again about the hall, more subdued and scattered at first, but rising in volume gradually for a quarter of an hour till the drawing-room was in an animated hum again. . . .

But just then the same servant returned. After the State, the Church! This time Donna Edvige also rose. The Alamanni vestibule this time saw the family fall in

line, as it were in three divisions: in the advance guard, Donna Edvige, the believer, kneeling to kiss the Cardinal's ring; just behind her, that old limb of the Devil reconciled somehow or other with God, bending his torso at right angles with his legs; and three steps behind the Marquis, the new generation, the champion of free thought, bowing imperceptibly from the neck.

When the purple of the Cardinalate appeared in the portal of the drawing-room, between Donna Edvige's blue satin and Alamanni's black broadcloth, a gasp of mingled reverence and curiosity swept the room in a low murmur, like a puff of wind blowing over a field of grain. Was it really one of those fabulous personages of the Holy City who, on occasion, driving rapidly by in a carriage, illumined and dazzled the Profane City and its pedestrians as with a lightning flash—a Cardinal in flesh and blood? The little old man, solid on his feet, bulky, came slowly forward, smiling under his gold-rimmed eyeglasses! The gay groups fell silent in mood of constraint, forming a circle of respectful attentiveness about the Prince of the Church; while gentlemen and ladies one after the other bent the knee, curtseyed, bowed the head, under the eyes of the new Marquis, who was beginning to feel easier now that he held at least Church and State as hostages to Fame!

Five minutes elapsed; then seven more. The prattle of conversation had risen again, though only from here and from there, in subdued tones. Ten minutes . . . eleven! Alamanni was on pins and needles again! Would that servant never give some sign of life? The three minutes that the Russian Empire claimed beyond the regulation hour were for Alamanni a little eternity.

But the announcer of glad tidings appeared for the third time. Alamanni again motioned to Oliviero and to Donna Edvige. As the hosts withdrew, their guests understood: the Cossack Nero, the scourge of the Jews, the flail of the socialists, the might of Holy Scythia!

Again the drawing-room fell into anxious silence.

But the sudden hush, this time, seemed to prolong the

delay. With every one expectant, the expected did not come! But, oh, at last! Under the portal, a man and a woman: a giant in evening clothes, a sallow leanness of doubtful age, a harsh, irregular Mephistophelian face, the cheek-bones protruding, the eyes cavernous under great bushy eyebrows; and a young woman, tall, slender, white from her slippers to the ribbons in her hair, all silk, all opulence, all splendor, from the rosy milk of neck and shoulders into which the pearls seemed to melt, to the rosy florid fullness of line and of flesh, to the flooding gold of the hair, to the scarlet of the little mouth, to the blue of the eyes, celestial in a bright, radiant face.

They came forward, she smiling, he frowning, flanked by Donna Edvige to the left of the Grand Duke and the Marquis Alamanni to the right of the Grand Duchess, and behind, the Duke's aide-de-camp and the Duchess' lady-in-waiting. But all eyes were for him, for Power enhanced by Terror, at whose side even Beauty shrank small and grew dim.

Neither simple nor expeditious the ceremony of the presentations, a matter for the ladies of semi-genuflections before Their Highnesses, and for the gentlemen, of low bows. And it was a delicate task to arrange the procession to the dining-room in accord with the rules of precedence. But at last, after a great bustling of servants, the ladies and their cavaliers were seated all; and the trains of satin, velvet, silk, which in those days women dragged along behind them at formal functions, were coiled up and stowed away in peace at their owners' feet under the table.

The dinner began. It began reserved and cold, as all dinners begin when Power presides over the table in official garb, served by a regiment in blue livery, offering viands, changing services, pouring wines, leaning over the shoulders of guests unaware of their presence, rapid, precise, noiseless, an army of silent automatons, directed by a fat, frowning old man at the end of the room who gave orders for the most part with his eyes, but also occasionally with a gesture or a word murmured in an inaudible tone. It be-

gan with the oysters from Ostend and with a dish which the miniature menu defined, in Eleusinian language, as *potage crême d'écrevisses et consommé sterlet au champagne.* And embarrassed, shy as it were, congealed by those three potentates on whom the guests scarcely ventured to lift their eyes from time to time, it continued with *saumon à la Pierre le Grand*—so testified the historical and somewhat adulatory erudition of the Alamanni chef.

Only one among the banqueters looked upon the Grand Duchess not as a princess, but as the beautiful woman she was. And he for his part did not take his eyes from her.

"What's the matter, Marchesino?" asked Oliviero's neighbor on the right, a middle-aged woman of the Collar category, much talked about in her day and who was still deliberately, aggressively jestful with young men, perhaps in satisfaction of a yearning still to flirt a little late in the season. "Are you already in love with the Grand Duchess?"

Oliviero was admiring the Grand Duchess with that half-grateful adoration which is so easily kindled in the hearts of sentimental young men by great feminine beauty; and in that adoration he was more reconciled to social inequalities, finding it less unjust at that moment that such a wondrous beauty should be a Grand Duchess surrounded by so much wealth, and an object of so much worship. If Oliviero had a pair of beautiful eyes to thaw the polar ice of an official reception, there were, fortunately, for the other guests, the viands and the wines which the new Marquis was serving and pouring. Little by little joviality began claiming its own. At the course marked *canetons de Rouen* (and the squab duckling was to be followed with *punch à la romaine*) the Grand Duchess, who was sitting at the Cardinal's right, turned to her other neighbor, the Marquis Alamanni, and began appreciating her hosts in a tone which animated conventional courtesy with a kindness spontaneous and sincere.

"I like the Marchesa so much!" she said to him. "One

senses in her a rare intelligence and a noble spirit. I do hope she likes me too!"

"The Marchesa was deeply touched by the graciousness with which Your Imperial Highness received her," Alamanni hastened to reply, referring to the call which he and Donna Edvige had paid the Grand Ducal couple two days before at their hotel, and to a second visit which Donna Edvige had had the day before with the Grand Duchess alone. But the Duchess with winning grace straightway restored equality to the Marchesa whose husband had placed her kneeling at the Imperial feet.

"What a pity that she does not live in Moscow! We should become great friends, I am sure! The Marchesa is really one of the people with whom I feel utterly at ease. But you will bring her to Moscow, won't you, Marquis? You promise? And your son too! He looks like a most attractive young man!" And she glanced to her left towards the end of the table where Oliviero was seated.

"You should see him on horseback!" Alamanni exclaimed. "He is a centaur!"

"He looks like his mother," said the Grand Duchess, continuing to gaze at him. "The same sweet expression . . ."

"I call him a handsome boy," said the Cardinal, breaking in with a smile. "The Apollo type!"

"He is not ugly, and he's not a bad boy," conceded Alamanni. "He gets that from his mother, however, from his mother only. . . ."

"Is he an officer?" asked the Duchess.

While Alamanni was explaining Oliviero's leave of absence and his proposed tour, the Grand Duke confided to his neighbor on his left, an elderly but still beautiful lady, and to the Premier, who was seated a chair beyond her, his admiration for the Royal Carabinieri, a branch of the service which he always thought of as a model one.

The Premier thanked His Highness in the name of the police of the peninsula:

"Thaon di Revel's fine creation has not felt the effect

of time. It is a pleasure, Your Highness, to hear the greatest empire in the world paying tribute through your lips to these brave little defenders of law and order who are sustaining the authority of their King and protecting society from the intrigues of anarchy in every nook and corner of our realm. . . . But we should be thankful not only for your admiration! We would be grateful for your help too! . . ."

"Help? And how could we help?" asked the Grand Duke, a little mystified.

"You can, you can! . . . Why is Russia fighting us in Abyssinia? Why is she sending missions there to help and advise our enemies? We hope to expand in Africa for the same reasons that you, for two centuries past, have been expanding so notably in Europe and in Asia. Empire strengthens the prestige of the Crown among the popular elements and the Crown is the foundation of order! Whenever I can announce a victory in Africa to the nation, the policeman in the most distant village in the Kingdom is stronger and steadier in his place. . . . If we should suffer a setback in Africa, who would profit by it? The enemies of monarchy, of order, of society! Your policy in Africa makes you allies of such people! . . ."

While the Premier was delivering this speech, the Grand Duke was trying to listen, but he had begun to hitch restlessly about as though tormented by a strange nervousness. He kept turning his head, now to the right, now to the left, shaking his shoulders, swallowing. His eyes were now on the Grand Duchess and now on the end of the table to the right; then he sat silent a moment; finally he replied somewhat constrained:

"Let's not exaggerate, let's not exaggerate! These are concerns of our Foreign Office. We have nothing to do with them! You have headed many ministries, and with distinguished success. You know that even better than I do. The bureaus have their traditions and, if you wish, their fixed ideas. No minister and no sovereign can control them directly!"

"There's an International of anarchy and disorder in Europe. What we ought to have is an International of law and order too!" Thus spake the elderly but still beautiful lady seated between His Highness and His Excellency, looking like a lighthouse of diamonds, so many and so lustrous did they shine in her hair, on her neck, on her arms, on her hands.

Donna Edvige, meantime, was discussing home-weaving and embroidery among the peasants of Russia with the ambassador of that country, who sat at her right. She was explaining a society which she, with other society women, was trying to found with the object of saving the beautiful tradition of that art in Italy. But at her left she could sense the strange restlessness of the Grand Duke.

"Is he afraid of a bomb even here?" she thought, interested and at the same time amused. Suddenly, His Highness turned towards her and asked abruptly:

"Is it true, Marchesa, that you are the only lady in Roman society who does not smoke?"

In those days if the spindle and the distaff had ceased to be emblems of femininity, tobacco had not yet replaced them as such. Only ladies of the aristocracy smoked a rare cigarette, and privately, behind closed doors.

"The only one? No, Highness! One of the few, perhaps. Unfortunately there is little of the *fin de siècle* about me!"

"But I admire you for just that, Marchesa!" the Grand Duke replied, but scowling at Oliviero at the head of the table, as it seemed to Donna Edvige just then. "You are setting an example! A cigarette in a woman's mouth is a challenge to tradition. It is, therefore, revolt!"

"However *vieux jeu* myself, I would not be so severe, Highness!" said Donna Edvige, smiling. "Ladies are smoking in our drawing-rooms to differentiate themselves from the middle classes and the people. It is a little sin of vanity—a way of being chic!"

"But seeking distinction in innovation at the expense of

tradition—what is that but revolt? A woman who lights a cigarette ought to be whipped in the public square!"

"Oh, Your Highness, pray allow a woman whose lips have never been soiled with the vile weed to prostrate herself at your feet and implore pardon for all you would condemn to the whipping-post!" And Donna Edvige laughed. "If all manifestations of the revolutionary spirit were as harmless as smoking . . ."

"No manifestation of the revolutionary spirit is harmless!" insisted the Grand Duke, and now he was scowling at the Grand Duchess. "The spirit of revolt is the Devil, it is Anti-Christ; and it is everywhere, beginning with our drawing-rooms. We must give it no truce whether in men or in women, in children or in dotards, in the upper classes or in the masses. You have a son, Marchesa! Pray to God on your knees that he never rebels! I am glad I have no children; for all the younger generation of today is rebellious, even in our royal palaces. When I think that the heir of one of the most powerful thrones of Europe committed suicide because his father had ordered him to forget a woman! . . ."

"My son is a good boy, however! . . ."

"Even good boys revolt, and for more dangerous reasons than bad boys. The Archduke Rudolph was a superior person. Among those we deport to Siberia are people of the best breeding. . . ."

"Then why not deport to Siberia the relics of the saints you worship in the Kremlin?" said Donna Edvige, laughing. "The saints were all good rebels!"

The Grand Duke smiled at this sally, seemed to master his nerves, and replied for the first time in free mirth, looking at Donna Edvige instead of scowling about the table:

"I understand, Marchesa, I understand! The devil has laid a paw on you as well. When you come to Moscow I shall have you watched! . . ."

"That will not be difficult! Her Highness, the Grand Duchess, wants me as her guest at the Kremlin. . . ."

"The Kremlin is one of the most suspicious places in Moscow, and, unfortunately, one of the most difficult to watch! But we shall take extra precautions when you come!"

The servants had brought a gigantic roast of wild boar, "hunted in the royal estates of Castel Porziano," Alamanni hastened to explain, as if that august origin were its most delicious sauce. But with a portion of the wild boar before him, the neighbor to the right of the Lady in the Collar who had chaffed Oliviero (he was a famous mathematician, Senator of the Realm and a beacon of the Lincei) asked his charming neighbor to identify the elderly but still beautiful lady, seated between the Grand Duke and the Premier, who looked like a lighthouse of diamonds.

"Don't you know her?" answered the Lady of the Collar, smiling. "That's the Duchess Litta!"

"Really? Really?" And the Senator opened a pair of wide eyes, as one might gaze at a celebrity of long standing encountered in the flesh at last.

"She is seldom seen about in society!" added the Lady of the Collar, with intention. "It took a Grand Duke to entice her from her little palace on Piazza Esquilino. . . ."

"Duchess Litta Visconti Arese, née Countess Bolognini Attendolo Sforza!" droned the mathematician's neighbor, a member of the Board of Heraldry, slowly, accentuating each title separately to give it its separate emphasis. "Half the history of Italy is wrapped up in those titles!"

After the wild boar followed, as the menu explained, *bécasses sur croûtes,* with *salade de concombres.* But between the woodcock and the marvel of Strasbourg (the boxes lost in Switzerland had been trailed in due time) a lively discussion arose in Oliviero's neighborhood. It was a question of heraldry—the titles of the Holy Roman Empire. The debaters were that Most Serene Highness with whom Oliviero had quarreled on the Cavalieri case, and that member of the Consulta Araldica who had in-

toned the noble titles of the elderly but still beautiful lighthouse of diamonds seated between the Grand Duke and the Premier.

Even Oliviero had to confess to a quite definite pleasure in following the subtle argument. It may have been the dainty fare and the wine. It may have been the warmth of the room, or the brilliant lighting. It may have been the splendor of the gems, of the glassware, of the silver. It may have been the low-cut gowns of the women and their continuous half-voluptuous rustling of silk! It may have been the beauty of the Grand Duchess! It may have been all those things combined! Oliviero, at any rate, felt himself nestling in a deliciously warm bath of sensuous bliss, with the sweetness of which the gall of his inner mood seemed to blend in a strangely piquant emulsion.

Those people were—or seemed to be—all so satisfied! They were so convinced that the world, thanks to them, was going perfectly! In the course of an hour, he had heard so many things that would have been very fine if only they had been true! The Minister of Finance, seated at another wing of the table and who had not said a word, was the first financier in Europe and the savior of Italy. In the Premier the whole world had to envy Italy the real and only successor of Prince Bismarck! Half of Abyssinia and nearly half of Africa was already in Italian hands. . . . And that beautiful Grand Duchess, and that unanimous self-admiration, and that splendor, that wealth, those pleasures, which encompassed that self-admiration! Should he renounce all such, to emigrate to America because Rome, the "marrow of the universe," seemed to have gone stale on his hands? Why, everybody would think him crazy—everybody, even the Grand Duchess, even . . . yes, even Elena!

He suddenly remembered certain phrases, expressions, attitudes of hers to which, at the time, he had paid no particular attention. And now he understood! Consenting out of love, Elena nevertheless considered his plan of going to America an insane impulse—and she was right!

It really was that, even he could see it now. What surprised him was that he had been able to argue such a proposition for so long a time with himself, as though it had been something to be taken seriously!

And out of the confused memory of so many remarks made by his father or by his friends in the course of the years, another thought leapt and presented itself to his mind, clean-cut, luminous, imperious, as the conclusive answer to all the doubts that had been tormenting him for a long time. . . . What were all those titles of nobility, those crosses, those stars, those academic distinctions, those jewels, that rainbow of scarfs, that elegance, that magnificence, that wealth, that reciprocal adulation, that self-admiration? Were they not, simply, weapons, instruments, arguments with which those people exalted themselves over other people in order to command them? Some one had to rule; but no one could ever rule unless he thought himself, and others thought him, stronger, more intelligent, more worthy than those who were to obey! And from this point of view, all that splendor, from the dishes to the wine, from the silverware to that dainty menu, from those women who were, or had been, beautiful to the costly gowns they wore; all those titles and honors, beginning with his own marquisate, seemed to him suddenly sacred, sublime, invaluable things, because they were at once the reward and the instrument of power for those who had succeeded in conquering the right to rule in its various hypostases—positions, honors, wealth. And the power to rule, in itself and through its rewards and vehicles, was the most beautiful thing, the one beautiful thing, in the world!

The "King of Rome," the son of his father, the youth reared on the Acropolis among the exasperations and the anxieties of tottering Power, was reappearing. Susanna, Marietta, the injustices of the world, which had been causing him so much suffering, the tribulations and the miseries of his fellow men, which had cried out to him from his books, were receding to a far-away corner of his

spirit. Elena, Castelnuovo, and, to an extent, even the Comte de Barge, were right! And since they were right, even the torment of his jealousy dissolved in that warmth of pleasure and luxury, before which all the rugged energies of the soul gave ground. Elena was just one of the many pleasures of that life of delights, and when that pleasure gave out, others would be there ready to take its place—so many of them, and all within reach of his hand! Dulled if not forgotten his many troubles! He was joking, flirting with the ladies about him. He did not rebel even inwardly, now, when he heard that world praising itself as perfect; and, meantime, he could look at the Grand Duchess!

"She has caught you!" whispered his sharp-eyed neighbor, who had been watching him.

But suddenly Oliviero was aware that the Grand Duchess and the Cardinal were gazing at him and discussing him. At that distance he could hardly hear the Cardinal say:

"He's modeled after a Greek statue!"

And the Grand Duchess:

"That young man must be rather dangerous to women!"

But Oliviero had lowered his eyes in embarrassment under their gaze.

He lifted them quickly enough to take in what was happening. . . . Just as he dropped his eyes, a sentence of incomprehensible words, but in a sharp intonation of rebuke, struck the ears of all the company. The Grand Duke had hurled them at the Grand Duchess, and she, like a schoolgirl caught in fault, had lowered her head, blushing, and made no answer.

The Russian ambassador, seated beside Donna Edvige, was seized with a sudden interest in the Saxon porcelains that adorned the table, and he asked his hostess about them. But everybody had divined that His Imperial Highness had spoken rudely to his beautiful consort, the reason something that the barbarous idiom of the reproof, and

the discretion of the only three people who had comprehended it, would never betray!

But the dinner was drawing to a close. The turn of the *corbeille de glace parisienne* had come, followed by the sweets of the post-dessert. The more lavishly the servants were proffering these in their sumptuous silver trays, the less the guests were taking advantage of them. Every one was satiated. The wines, red and white, were stagnating in the decanters or bubbling lazily in the glasses. The ladies were looking curiously, some of them pitifully, at the Grand Duchess, who now apparently dared to turn her eyes neither to right nor left. What could her Imperial spouse have said? The boldest whispered in her neighbor's ear:

"I imagine our Grand Duke keeps a knout hanging at the head of his bed!"

The conversation was languishing before the imminent signal for rising, but the argument between the Prince of the Holy Roman Empire and the Heraldic Consultor flared up in a dying blaze.

"But do you or do you not admit," said His Most Serene Highness, "that the only authority competent to confirm a title of nobility is the successor of the authority which conferred it? Is His Majesty the King of Italy the successor of the ancient heads of the Holy Roman Empire? To my knowledge, no! How then can the Board of Heraldry, which judges in the name of His Majesty, either recognize, or confirm, or renew, a title granted by the Emperor?"

"One moment, one moment!" cried the Consultor. "The Italian government has the right to pass on the authenticity of any title used in Italy—therefore, even on the authenticity of titles emanating from the Holy Roman Empire. That's what the Consulta Araldica is for—nothing else!"

"Yes," replied His Most Serene Highness. "But only so far as it is a foreign title worn by an Italian family. You cannot pass on its legitimacy. You can only register

the affidavit of the competent foreign authority which establishes the authenticity of the title—in our case, the affidavit of the Emperor of Austria, sole legitimate successor to the ancient Emperor!"

"*Nego! Nego!*" said the consultor. "I deny categorically any such competency to the Emperor of Austria! The Emperor of Austria is not the successor of the Holy Roman Empire. The Empire had no successors! So much so, that the Emperor of Austria himself disclaims any qualification to recognize those old titles."

"You mean, to confer new titles under the ancient denominations! But he is qualified to validate the old titles —he could not be better qualified! How can you deny that the Austrian Empire succeeded in 1806 to the Holy Roman Empire? Did it not claim the latter's traditional patrimony at the Congress of Vienna? Why was it awarded the inheritance of Venice save in virtue of the Treaty of Campoformio? And with whom did Bonaparte make the Treaty of Campoformio if not with the Emperor —the Emperor par excellence, the Emperor one and sole who still existed in those happy days when an honest citizen could leave his house of a morning without fear of running down an Emperor at every street-corner?"

And who knows how long this engrossing subject would have been mooted, had not the signal to rise from table broken in upon it?

The guests filed back in procession to the drawing-rooms. There the servants were distributing coffee, liqueurs, cigars. The after-dinner guests were arriving in a steady stream, now a few at a time, now in crowds. Shortly the rooms were filled with ambassadors, ministers plenipotentiary, diplomats of minor grades; ladies-in-waiting on the Queen with the large "M" and the Crown embroidered in gold on their bosoms; high officials in cape and sword; members of Parliament, princes, dukes, marquises, counts, barons, both foreign and domestic; decorations, stars, crosses; chevaliers, and dames of lofty station. Most of them knew each other. They bowed,

greeted back and forth, smiled, gathered in small ambulatory groups according to acquaintanceships and sympathies.

Donna Edvige and Alamanni had placed themselves a step from the door which led from the palace vestibule into the great hall and awaited their guests as they entered, to bid them welcome. The Grand Duchess held court in the first drawing-room, seated in a gorgeous, gilded armchair. In another room stood the Grand Duke talking and smoking in a circle of ministers and soldiers (among these the Generalissimo of the Carabinieri) and one woman—the Duchess who bore half the history of Italy in her name. The Cardinal had taken refuge in a corner of the third drawing-room with a little congregation of pious ladies about him. Oliviero strolled idly about, from one room to another, meeting old friends, his own or the family's, and making new ones.

His father's prediction was coming true! His reconciliation with Society was made. All were now reassured. The triumphal splendor of that banquet had cleared the air of the dubious rumors which had been circulating on his account. Congratulations, compliments, praises! Even "la bella Giuditta" came to meet him with outstretched hands, a friendly smile on her face, and a "Marchesino" on her lips, the word uttered without ironical undertone and in sincere effusion.

Impatient for a glimpse of the ruthless jailer of Siberia, the exterminater of strikers, the wielder of the knout, all the late arrivals, even those who had no hopes of an introduction, gave a turn about the room where the Grand Duke was still standing, wearing out the legs of his coterie, and receiving from time to time, stiff, impassive, the salutation of some person of importance whom a Minister or the General of the Carabinieri would present to him. The privileged guests who had been honored to dine with him were besieged by everybody: What had he said? What had he done?

Yet underneath, the party was astir with a current of

subdued mirth. What a joke! How amusing! During dinner the Nero of the North had made a scene with his wife, in public—like a drummer of wools and yarns jealous of a seamstress sweetheart! She had been making eyes at Oliviero! Who had interpreted his remark? Among the fifty guests, there were the Ambassador, the lady-in-waiting and the aide-de-camp! But two other ears must have heard and understood how a Scythian belabors his wife!

The story was going the rounds with other phrases dropped by the Grand Duke at table.

"As Governor of Moscow, he has women whipped if they smoke! Here the only one to escape would be the Marchesa Alamanni!" Thus the unlettered Roman princess, in mock alarm, to the chevalier who was holding a match to her cigarette.

The Grand Duke was still a terrible character in the imagination of the company at large. But those who had dined with him, after two hours of that familiarity which breeds contempt, were beginning to feel at ease with the monster and to smile instead of tremble—the fate, it would seem, of all terrors! Some were already making bold to whisper that, everything considered, and though Russia was a huge empire, it was more comfortable to live in Rome under the rule of Humbert than in Moscow under the *nagaika* of a Grand Duke, who whipped women for smoking, scolded his wife in public, and used spies in his own home.

After the months of suspicion, accusation, and social ostracism which he had been suffering, Oliviero frankly enjoyed the good will he now felt about him. For a moment he seemed really to have become reconciled with society; and at that moment, the "King of Rome," the son of the Marquis Alamanni, the youthful tenant of the Acropolis, could only smile at a callow Oliviero who had been cursing wealth, making plans for emigrating to America as the last refuge of free spirits! He had been born up there on the Acropolis and from up there he could command others and enjoy life! Could he be such a fool as to step

down, descend to the plains, lose himself in the herd forever destined to serve?

But then, all at once, he began to stumble upon the old world again. There, in the crowd, and a few steps from his sometime victim, the Countess Maria, was "Pot-Belly," the banker who attempted seductions on unfortunate noblewomen who sought his help! And there a certain Marquise, from abroad, who was lady-in-waiting to a Royal Princess in passage through Rome. The Royal Princess, a widow, old and eccentric, had married her young painting-master; and the Marquise in question introduced all sorts of people to her mistress provided they paid toll to her! "What harm is there in that?" said the Princess. "I am above suspicion; and my lady-in-waiting rounds out her pay!" The prestige of a crown on the counter at retail!

The guests were being politely shooed towards the music-room by a platoon of footmen who were circulating from group to group.

"The concert is beginning, ladies and gentlemen!"

Oliviero followed, in company with an apprentice in the Department of Finance, just returned on leave from St. Petersburg. As they reached their seats toward the back of the music-room (the front row was reserved for specially invited guests) the young attaché began:

"Congratulations! You have already made the Grand Duke jealous!"

And he repeated the story that was going about.

"Who invented such nonsense?" protested Oliviero.

The attaché shrugged his shoulders with a smile and answered brutally:

"The Grand Duke is a ——."

And he repeated gossip he had heard in Russia about the private lives of that Imperial couple—the story really of Alberto Cavalieri and Susanna, the story of a fantastic and capricious love, always in a paroxysm lest others might succeed where it was not able, and did not care, to succeed itself. That beautiful vice-Empress of

Moscow could not step outside her door, read a book, receive a guest, write a letter, without fiat from her lord and master. She lived under the eyes of a hundred spies and far worse than in a harem, because hers was a solitary harem open to the view of the world. And her reward for such patience was to receive every now and then a public rebuke!

The concert-room was already full, save that the front row of sumptuous thrones still awaited the Grand Duke, the Cardinal and the Duchess who was a lighthouse of diamonds. As a matter of fact, the three of them had retired by themselves to a corner in the great hall and were deep in a spirited argument on a subject of evident importance—they sat deaf to the prompting of the footmen who were marshaling the audience for the concert.

"Yes," the Grand Duke was saying to the Duchess, "he is a man of intellect, I grant you. And a real statesman! But there you are, there you are . . . he has been a republican, and a conspirator! . . ."

"True!" replied the Duchess vivaciously. "But doesn't that prove the supernatural power of the monarchical idea? Its adversaries become its most zealous servants! I assure Your Highness, our dynasty has never found, not even in the most ancient families of the Piedmontese aristocracy, a more devoted, one might almost say, a more enamored servant than this sometime conspirator! He was a republican, yes! And he conspired, yes! But against the old dynasties. . . ."

"Which likewise had their investitures from God!" supplied the Grand Duke.

"Certainly! But not even dynastic investitures are eternal. God gives them—God can take them away! Can't He, Your Eminence?"

The Cardinal knitted his brow, smiled faintly, and replied with a half-ironical conciseness:

"*Dabo tibi regem in furore meo et auferam in indignatione mea!* Thus spake the Lord Himself through the

mouth of His prophet Hosea, 'I shall give thee a king in mine anger and take him away in my wrath.' "

The Grand Duke and the Duchess had not been expecting the intrusion of a Jewish prophet into their argument. They looked at the bepurpled prelate for a moment, perplexed. Then the Grand Duke said, with a smile:

"So the Lord puts us where we are to punish our peoples with our vices?"

"Not all dynasties, perhaps; but some, certainly! The text speaks clearly!"

"And which of our dynasties are punishments from God?" asked the woman's irrepressible curiosity.

"Now that, Duchess, is not a fair question!" laughed the Cardinal. "How could a poor priest know, who spends his life among musty old books, praying and telling his rosary?"

"Bosh, Eminence!" the Duchess rejoined. "What you people don't know about politics is hardly worth knowing! We sit at your feet as admiring pupils!"

"To judge by the way you heed our sermons, one would not say so!" said the churchman, dryly.

"I think I can guess what His Eminence means to say," said the Grand Duke. "Dynasties of heretics and Catholic dynasties which have annoyed the Church—such are the scourges of God; and they in their turn will be scourged by ruin!"

"In that case, who of you would be saved?" returned the Cardinal, with a twinkle in his eye.

But the Duchess protested with charming vehemence:

"No! No! No! I do not like that prophet of yours! He is a socialist! The monarchical idea cannot perish. It will conquer the whole world. Even America will have to set up a king some day."

"Let us hope!" sighed the Grand Duke, with the troubled air of one not entirely convinced.

"Let us hope!" echoed the Cardinal with the ironical condescension of one convinced of the exact opposite.

"But as my sainted master reminds us: monarchy is the best of good governments and the worst of bad: democracy the worst of good governments and the best of bad. . . ."

At this point the Marquis Alamanni approached. He had come in person to beg the three illustrious guests to favor his concert with their presence; and when they were in their places, it began—a quartet from Beethoven.

Music has the magic gift of speaking to each of us the language of our particular passion. The same notes, according to the ear they reach, spell sorrow or joy, hope or discouragement, victory or defeat. To most of that audience, doubtless, that music on that occasion, tickled, if at all, the commonplace hope or the banal anxiety, the indifferent joy or the fleeting irritation, of a day not very different from other days, notwithstanding the novelty of a Grand Duke.

But there was one soul upon which it blared like a fanfare of triumph saluting a conquest of the pinnacle of life. Standing on the dizziest height of fortune with that whirlwind of harmony roaring about his head, the Marquis Alamanni could turn and look down upon all that lay below. The bones of the grandfather who had worn a patrician's livery in Milan could sleep in peace in the mausoleum where they had been gathered by the grandson's father! He was now part of the nobility and with wealth untold! No royal habitat great or small, no one of the palaces which hid the face of Power from the eyes of the vulgar, no one of the strongholds in which the great of the earth barricaded their pride, would close their gates in his face now! None of the preëminences—whether of birth, or of fame, or of intelligence, would refuse him welcome as an equal. He was one of the rulers of the world! In two generations the transfigured line of the liveried lackey had scaled all the heights and climbed to that peak, that title, that evening, that honor! Oliviero, too, had become reconciled with society and would soon be entering on his novitiate as heir and continuator of all

this power! The dynasty was founded, and from generation to generation it would shine in ever more illustrious grandeur. All the pride of the dying century, which had hurled its great challenge in the face of Destiny, of Nature, of History, of God, with a pledge to remake the world on a new model, was throbbing exultant in the heart of this, its Blessèd and Belovèd.

The Blessèd and Belovèd could not have dreamt that, at that moment, the tortured spirit of the person he loved enough almost to identify him with his own fortune, was translating that same hymn of triumph into mystic rage against the grandeurs which the Blessèd and Belovèd most admired. That glamour of self-satisfaction which, at the full height of the banquet, had momentarily changed the aspect of things in Oliviero's eyes, had vanished again. World-sickness may be an affliction of adolescence subject to periodic returns. Or it may have been the depression due to meeting again those persons whom he disliked. It may have been that the attaché's gossip about the Grand Duchess had aroused in him that chivalrous and half-amorous pity which made every abuse of a beautiful and attractive woman seem a crime and a personal misfortune in his eyes. At any rate once that deluge of harmony poured over him, Oliviero could see nothing save Susanna, ill and perhaps dying, in prison, and a terrible "Why?" looming like a great black specter over the splendor of the *fiesta*. Why was that innocent purity persecuted by her relatives, by the Law, by Fortune, by the frivolous and implacable hatred of the world, while all those mediocre people, vicious often when not frankly wicked, were calmly enjoying the good things of life which they had in no way deserved—not only wealth, luxury, pleasure, but even the esteem and the admiration of their fellow creatures? He raised his eyes to the ceiling of the music-room, and there he could see a great cardinal's hat which had been sculptured in the center of the hall so as to spread its plaits like two protecting arms over the escutcheon beneath and over the guests assembled in the

room below; and he remembered that the prelate eternized in that palace and on that ceiling, had been a spendthrift, a sybarite, a libertine, a connoisseur of feminine flesh, a leech on the treasury of God and of his flocks, a rascal and a scandal, in short. And there was the Grand Duke a few steps away; and the Grand Duke? "The Grand Duke is a ——!" At first the epithet had struck him as the half-serious slander of an enemy diplomat. Now it struck him as true. And straightway the vision which had dazzled him during the banquet came back upon him, but turned upside down. The society about him was no longer an élite appropriating the emblems of superiority because it was destined to rule by virtue of courage, of intelligence, of pride, of ability. The wealth and the power it held were the plunder of unscrupulous, pitiless, conscienceless men. Stronger than anything else in those people there, stronger than love, than liberty, than all the sane satisfactions of conscience, was the mere ambition to live in that vicious world of idlers, which regarded itself, and wished to be regarded, as the flower of the earth. But to live in that world one had above all to be rich—woe unto him who became poor! To be rich was for all of them the highest virtue and an insuperable merit. Without money nothing counted, not even holiness and genius; wherefore, if only there were money in it, the women were quite willing to sell themselves in matrimony or out of matrimony; and the men would fawn upon each other, deprave each other, rob each other! Men and women alike prostrate at the feet of Power, which is the great protector of Wealth, its overt or secret accomplice, its companion in orgy and shame! Now he could see—see why Guicciarelli, who had murdered an innocent woman, was still admired and revered, while his victim and the woman who had defended her, were in prison; see why so many people, who had slandered him behind his back in the months preceding, were now—greater insult still!—courting and flattering him; see why no one stood aghast at the blood that all could see on the Grand Duke's hands, while

many, on the contrary, seemed to grow drunk with admiration at sight of it. The Russian cross had worked the miracle for Guicciarelli. The marquis' crown had worked the miracle for himself. That title of "Imperial Highness" had worked its daily miracle for the bloodthirsty Nero of the North, who slaughtered Jews and workingmen, and—darkest tyranny of all—chained and flailed that divine beauty, his wife! Now he could see—yes, now he could see! They wallowed in blood, in corruption, in vice; they despised each other, they hated each other, because each believed himself the superior of the other. But they desired to live together in order to deceive themselves into thinking that they were, all together, the flower of the earth! It was to persuade themselves of that that they counterfeited virtue, honor, truth, all things precious and holy which they lacked, with a few false and hypocritical conventions—titles, orders, decorations, precedences, superiorities:—fiat paper precisely, without collateral in the gold of personal worth—just as Accolti said! People who an hour before, in the glow of the banquet, had been resplendent in Oliviero's eyes as emblems and instruments of superiority, had now suddenly paled into insubstantial larvae of a monstrous imposture.

And at every stroke of the rhythmic violin, at every vibration of the quivering strings, another fragment of gilded stucco dropped from the splendorous mask, leaving a crude rough-hewn wall of reality before his eyes. Yes, flight! Flight! Flight to Africa, to America, to the moon! . . . Fortunately Elena was willing! He would talk with his father the very next day. He would go with Elena to America and live with her a free life as a free and strong man!

The quartet came to an end and the applause broke. Donna Edvige had not abandoned her daring intention of approaching the Premier on a matter she had very much at heart. Just as the concert began, the Grand Duke's aide-de-camp, who had a seat in the front row between the Russian ambassador and the head of the Italian Govern-

ment, had left the building on an errand for his chief. She took advantage of the opportunity, presented herself with a gracious smile and bravely occupied the chair left free, resolving not to move from there till she had talked with the Premier of the matter she had so much at heart. Anxiously she had followed the last rapid bars of the quartet as it approached the end, growing so excited that she cried out, even before the applause had ceased:

"Your Excellency!"

But, in the uproar, the head of the Government did not hear her. Not till a moment later did he turn to her, and of his own accord, to pay her a compliment.

"Delicious music, and divinely executed! My congratulations, Marchesa. I am gratified and I am proud to see that there is still some one in Rome who knows how to entertain in the grand old style!"

And he turned toward the Cardinal.

"Your Excellency!" called Donna Edvige louder, vehemently, trembling to snatch him back before he could escape. The Premier was a little surprised at the breathless urgency of the appeal. As soon as he could, he turned to her again.

"I have something to tell you which may interest you!" she added in a lowered voice, hurriedly, as though anxious to confide a secret.

"Do, please! What is it?" answered the Premier, leaning a little toward her.

Donna Edvige began resolutely, but with beating heart:

"My husband has just received a letter from a friend of his in Paris, a banker, who has an agency at Gibuti. The letter says that the Abyssinians are preparing an army of a hundred thousand men to invade our colony this winter."

"I know! I know!" said the Minister, wearily and shaking his head, still leaning toward her and looking straight ahead. "We'll have fighting this winter! . . . But we should have to convince Sonnino, who refuses to

vote the money! If you could manage to do that, Marchesa! . . ."

But at this point he seemed to realize that he had gone too far. He sat up with a start, then he turned toward Donna Edvige and added slowly in a firm, peremptory tone:

"We'll attend to that in due time, Marchesa! And don't you worry! Thank you, however, for telling me about the letter. I'll take it up with your husband. But I beg of you: please don't spoil such a gorgeous party for yourself. Leave these irritating annoyances to us men. . . . Tell me, rather: who are these violinists—Germans?"

As the room lay drenched under a new deluge of music, it was the mother's turn to translate the second quartet (this time from Mozart) into the language of her own nervous alarm. Donna Edvige had grasped the full meaning of that weary, fatalistic, half-ironical reply which the head of the Government had unwarily let drop, and which he then had tried to recall with his haughty "We'll attend to that!" Her husband was right! What would be happening in Africa a few months thence?

The end of the concert, which comprised two numbers only, since time was pressing, drew her from her futile spasms. A final refreshment was to be served in another of the larger rooms from a great table set in the center and laden with every grace of God. But lines of little tables stood against the four walls, in accord with a deep design on the Marquis Alamanni's part. He had thought of offering History Her opportunity, if really She were bent on it! And Opportunity stood materialized in a table set in one corner at a noteworthy distance from the others. It was dressed with a wonderful lace cover and surrounded by three overstuffed armchairs in damask. In those chairs, according to the Machiavellian design of the new Marquis, History would seat the French Cardinal, the Russian Grand Duke and the Italian Premier, all by themselves and far from the madding crowd. There they would "exchange ideas" on the evils of the world and the

remedies therefor. And the plans had been carefully made to assist History in striking with a sure hand. Donna Edvige would tow the Grand Duchess to the other end of the room. The General of the Carabinieri would lead the Grand Duke to the historic table. Alamanni himself would attend to the Premier and to the Cardinal. As soon as the three big fellows had been served, Alamanni and the General would retire!

Fortune was surely in a good humor that evening, for even this little conspiracy succeeded.

A few minutes before midnight the Cardinal, the Grand Duke, and the Premier of Italy found themselves alone at the table especially prepared for them; and the public—both the chosen "public" which had places at the tables along the walls, and the public of lesser lights which stood crowded about the table in the center, warned of what was taking place, now with a nudge and a rolling of eyes, now with a pertinent word, began gazing on them at respectful distances, eating, drinking, conversing in hushed voices in order not to disturb the historic conversation, and wondering what the three could be talking about.

The Cardinal, his gold cross glistening on his cassock, seemed by tacit consent of the other two to be as it were "in the chair," and between one observation and another was quaffing a glass of champagne. The Grand Duke, at the Cardinal's right, his tall figure a little bent over his plate, was eating a slice of pineapple and sipping a cognac: he was not in a loquacious mood. The Premier, leaning frankly back in the tall embrace of his chair, but with head erect, was now listening and now talking—with Sicilian soberness, he was abstaining both from meat and from drink.

What could they be saying? All eyes were upon their faces, as though trying to guess from the movements of their lips the momentous pronouncements which were to prepare the future happiness of the peoples.

"They're discussing Church and State—what else would a Crispi and a Cardinal be talking about?"

"Crispi is explaining to the Grand Duke his project for an international crusade against anarchy."

Others, instead of guessing at what they were saying, were arguing about what they ought to be saying. Was it not time to consider whether, with France and Russia allied, there might not be something for Italy to gain in that quarter? An Africanist asserted that Crispi was asking His Highness for a categorical explanation of the Russian mission which had reached Constantinople on the way to Shoa.

Suddenly every one could observe that the Cardinal, putting on a long face and emphasizing his words with solemn gestures, had begun a speech which must have been an important one to judge by the attention with which the other two followed it. And the speech was rather long. The Cardinal talked for some time without an interruption either from the Grand Duke or the Prime Minister of Italy. Everybody had the same thought: oh, to be a fly to buzz around those three august heads and listen! His Eminence was probably stating in unequivocal terms the conditions on which the Vatican would consider a reconciliation!

But History has a way of turning fly to eavesdrop on the words which the great of the earth exchange among themselves in their most secret conclaves. And History, this time, is in a position to relate exactly what the Cardinal said to his two illustrious companions.

He was telling how for some time His Holiness had been suffering from a stomach trouble which the Pontifical archiater had been attributing to a bad habit His Holiness had of reading during his meals. He had even advised a remedy: a companion at table would amuse His Holiness! Vainly had the Holy Father objected that etiquette does not allow a Pope to dine in company. The physician, instead of changing prescriptions, advised a change in the papal rules. In the end, to please the physician without violating tradition, the Holy Father had hit on a re-

course: he would take a companion at table—but it would be a parrot!

"One fine day," the Cardinal was saying, "the Vatican payroll was enriched with a new payee: the pontifical parrot-at-meals! It was a magnificent bird, yellow and blue with a tail which reached the ground and a beak that would frighten a gendarme . . . a papal gendarme, I mean, of course. . . . But I need not describe the horror and the terror of His Holiness's valet the other day when he found the parrot dead, and with unmistakable signs of foul play. What hand had committed the murder? The query held the Vatican agog for a whole day. But this morning, it seems, the truth came to light—murder will out, you know! It seems that the parrot was fairly talkative as birds go, but not so talkative as a companion at table to a Pope might be expected to be; so the Holy Father, to loosen his tongue a little, had begun to poke him with the ebony wand he always carries with him. But the parrot did not know with whom he was dealing. He started to argue one day, but with his beak, and then His Holiness . . ."

The spectators were surprised to note that when the Cardinal ended the speech he had delivered with such earnestness, cutting the air up and down with his right arm, his two companions laughed.

But some one made the point at once: the great of this earth are wont to deal goodnaturedly, in jesting tone, without bad blood, even with the weightiest matters!

CHAPTER XII

Oliviero was awakened early the next morning after a restless night. A servant was bringing him a letter which had just come in. He tore it open hurriedly. It was from Elena.

"I have waited," it read, "before sending you this letter, till the great day in your house was over. I hope it will find you happy in your father's and your mother's triumph; and that the joy you take in their happiness will help you to bear the pain which I must give you now.

"Darling, by the time this reaches you, I shall be far away. I am leaving Rome forever and, with Rome, everything I hold dearest in the world. Without you life has neither reason nor meaning for me. But I cannot do anything else. To become your wife would have been my supreme happiness; but I care too much for you to win my happiness at your cost. Your plan about America is sheer madness. Another woman, I suppose, would have pretended to encourage you until she got you. Then she would have rebelled. I prefer to make the sacrifice myself by telling you the truth beforehand.

"I implore you, Oliviero: try to overcome this exasperation which is sweeping you into an irreparable mistake. People have been unkind to you and you have a right to complain; but be careful lest you have to repent some day of indulging a just resentment, by finding yourself déclassé. A person who once rebels against our world, even with the holiest right on his side, can never make his peace with it again. Think of the sorrow you would be giving your mother and your father, who have always been good to you! If the affliction that is tormenting you is really so serious that you need a long absence to be rid of it—well, go to Africa as an officer! Then when you are cured, you can come back again, be the man you were when you left, take your place in the world again without giving any one cause for reproach.

"I would have liked to convince you with my words and my caresses, and I tried to. But I lacked the courage and I lacked the ability. I am using the one recourse still left at my disposal: my sacrifice. You said that you would not go to America without me. . . . I summon all my strength and flee, without seeing you again, because I know that if I were to see you again I would not find the courage to save you by my sacrifice. For me it is the supreme sacrifice. Losing you, I lose everything.

"Good-by, true love of my life! From this evening on I shall live—but as a survival of myself, and in the memory of the only happiness I have had in life, the happiness you have given me. Leaving Rome, who knows for how many years, my

last thought will be for you, or rather for us. Forgive me, Oliviero, forgive me. This is all that I can do, and it hurts me more than it hurts you. It is no decision of mine, really. It is just fate! You will forget—I never shall. A year hence, you will think of me as just an episode in your life. For me you will be all of life, till I draw my last breath. A kiss, for the last time; and I beg you again, on my knees: forgive me, forgive me! Good-by, dear love!

"ELENA."

Oliviero sat dazed on the edge of his bed. He was in love. Elena's letter came upon him as the most despicable of betrayals, and he burst into desperate weeping. What a sacrifice she was making for him! A knife in the back, rather! Pretending hypocritically she was trying to save him; while there sat the treasures of the Aztecs, and Mexico, too rich, alas, in silver mines!

He dressed and ran to Elena's house, regardless of the imprudence he was committing. There he insisted on talking with an old maid of Elena's who he thought was aware of their secret—it was she who wrote the addresses on the letters Elena sent to him at home. He made no effort to hide his feelings: he implored the woman to tell him where Elena had gone. Finally, with great effort, he managed to gather that she had left Rome the evening before for Venice. There she would stop for a few days and would then go on to her estate at Conegliano.

For a moment he thought of hurrying to Venice and overtaking her. But he soon dismissed that idea, discouraged. He understood now, just as he had understood the evening before at the beginning of the banquet: Elena thought his idea of going to America absurd; she would never go with him. She wanted to have a husband in Rome, live among the pleasures and in the luxury of the Capital, things he could not endure! Their love was dead, murdered in cold blood by Elena's selfishness! In preference to him she had elected the frivolous joys of the worldly metropolis. He had to go . . . but not to America! Now that Elena had refused to accompany him, he could see—and

this time in earnest, conclusively—how ridiculous such a move would be! No—the other idea came back to him in its full force: Africa—he would go to Africa, where his father had already agreed that he should go, where Elena in her letter was urging him to go, hoping that she would get him killed there and then be able to marry Spinelli without remorse. Well, he would go to Africa! He would get himself killed! And her cruel hatred would be satisfied.

As often happens in moments of paroxysm, this time too Love was in part clairvoyant, in part not so near the truth!

Elena had really left for Venice the evening before; and —Poetry will go her bond on this score—after days and days of hesitation and weeping! She was sincerely renouncing her lover, her love, the world, her two suitors, both the adventurous marriage the one was proposing beyond the ocean and the humdrum, everyday marriage the other offered in Rome. She had determined to take refuge in her country place and put herself in the hands of some pious and farsighted confessor, who would help her to find the road to penitence and peace. And meantime she would bid poor Spinelli not to write to her any more, not to think of her any more, since she was the most unfortunate and the most unworthy of women!

She was a woman, and in loving, therefore, she lost her judgment less completely than her lover, and still was able to reason a little when he was altogether out of his head: as between those women for whom love is a passion and those for whom it is a curiosity of the senses and of the heart, Elena Asterio belonged among the latter. She had loved Oliviero. She still loved him; but with him she had finally satisfied a curiosity still left unsated by her unfortunate marriage and by her first and still more unfortunate venture in contraband love. She was left a widow just as her curiosity was beginning to wear out. She was thinking of marriage now, not as she had that first time, as a means of tearing the veil from one of the tormenting mysteries of flesh and soul, but as the gateway for re-

entering the worldly Eden from which she had been cast out and for recovering her lost possessions there. A regular and a not lonely life! A position in society with its quality properly trademarked! The help of a man in meeting the exigencies and difficulties of daily existence! . . . Oliviero was handsome, kind, well-mannered, generous; but even life with a just tolerable husband in a nice palace, with lavish expenditures and adequate means—life on the Acropolis of the world where, and where alone, living was living—all this would be to her liking too! A human aspiration—criminal it could not be called! That is why she had told a little lie (he that is without sin, let him cast the first stone!) in letting Oliviero believe that the two letters she had shown him were the only ones she had received from Spinelli, and that she never answered such letters. Spinelli wrote her from Bordighera every day and she answered at least once a week, even if only in succinct and circumspect notes! She had really lost her head when Oliviero proposed marriage; but she was a woman—and she found it again! She was terrified at that revolt against Power, Wealth, Nobility, the Acropolis of the World, which Oliviero had suggested they make as allies. She had wept! She had despaired! And at last, not daring to say no, and unwilling to leap off a precipice even in Oliviero's company, she had taken flight, but swearing to herself that since she was forced to inflict such pain on the person she most loved in the world, she had no longer the right to hope for any happiness.

Sincere? She was utterly sincere at that moment! But will she stick to it? Ah—that is another question! For love and marriage are constantly inverting rôles as cause and effect in the hearts of women. Sometimes a woman will marry the man she loves. But then again, she sometimes falls in love with the man she would marry! History on such a point can only say: "Let's keep an eye on her and see!"

At luncheon the Marquis did not notice anything. "I am satisfied!" he had said to Donna Edvige the night be-

fore, taking her in his arms and kissing her, there in the drawing-room from which the last guests had departed, leaving the air dense and heavy with the warmth of the multitude. He had, so to speak, given a receipt to Fortune, with a terse, but sincere, "Thank you." But now here were admirers crowding about him, to bask in the light of contentment that shone from that face as radiant as a sun of good cheer, and to reflect back upon it a glow of still more modest, more indirect, contentment.

"An evening so brilliant and so enjoyable we have not known in a long time. Crispi is right: we ought to revive the art of entertaining, which has been on the decline since away back in '48!"

Such the theme on which the conversation turned for more than an hour that day, at the sumptuous table of the Marquis Alamanni.

But the mother had resolved to have a serious talk with her husband about Oliviero's case. She noticed now that the boy was sitting there at the table, blank, absent-minded, half stupefied; and the moment the guests had gone, she hurried to him.

"What has happened to you, Oliviero!"

He looked at her for a moment, then he answered:

"Nothing has happened to me! But I am sick and tired of everything and everybody! . . . And I am going to Eritrea!"

"Eritrea? Because you are tired of everything? My boy, that's the way you explain your idea to yourself! It's not the reason! Something has happened to you! What? Another insult? Something has gone wrong? Is there a new danger to you—or Marietta? . . . Tell me!"

Donna Edvige had guessed instantly that her son had received a blow; but never having had the remotest suspicion of Elena and thinking rather of Susanna, she was miles from glimpsing the truth. For that matter, at just that moment she did not even know of Elena's departure from Rome. The Countess Asterio had left secretly in order not to arouse suspicions. She had planned to in-

form Donna Edvige of her intentions some days later and by degrees. The mother, accordingly, set out to drag the mysterious truth from her son by repeated cross-questionings and entreaties. But in vain. Oliviero hedged. He denied flatly and obstinately that anything particularly distressing had occurred. Whenever she maneuvered him to close quarters, he would wriggle out by launching a tirade of curses against Rome, against fashionable society, against his own futility. Finally his mother changed the subject:

"But what about your father? Have you thought of that? He won't hear of such a thing!"

"But he has already given me his consent! . . ."

"Yes, but just to humor you—it was after the duel! Now he is against it. I discussed it with him not so long ago."

Oliviero hesitated a moment; then he said:

"I am sorry if he disapproves. However . . . I am of age! I can go where I wish."

"That's true, you can! But would you care to go to him and tell him at just this moment that you are intending to leave for Africa because you are disgusted with money and with titles?"

Oliviero's idea of going to Africa was still rather a reprisal for pain than a firm resolve. Donna Edvige's reasoning shook him and she profited by his hesitation to extract a promise that before speaking to his father he would think it all over again.

That evening, at dinner, there was still another covey of fawning admirers. In such company, after entertaining a Grand Duke, Alamanni was feeling a bit of a Grand Duke himself. So he was now hankering to set about restoring the ancient power of absolute kings and nobles, and spoke his mind about modern parliamentary systems and about the aberrations of democracy.

"These Ministers! Oh, these Ministers!" he said, as if inspired by a wisdom which had descended upon him with his title and with the visit of the Grand Duke. "How many

of those poor wretches have I seen in régimes like the one that is now governing us! Usually, when they climb the stairs of a department building wearing the title of Excellency for the first time, they are still men, made of muscle and bone. . . . But give them three months, and then what do you find? A sort of mucilaginous creature, a jelly-fish, floating in dirty water! All the will they had, all the brains, have gone somewhere! And why? Because they are Powers any one can see! There they are, on view in the public square. All interests have access to them and they have to listen to what each interest has to say. Now the world is made up of a thousand conflicting interests, and they assert themselves in all directions. So there you have your poor devil, now pushed and now pulled, first to the right, then to the left. He's smoothed, tickled, insulted, browbeaten, threatened! Well, after three months of such treatment, the poor fool is dizzy—who wouldn't be? He doesn't know what it's all about any more. Not only does he not know his own mind. He hasn't any mind; he can't even think! He's just a ball to be tossed back and forth by his secretaries. Your real Powers today are all silent and they are all invisible. The more conspicuous a Power appears, the less it is a Power. We still have a government, in spite of our ministers, our deputies, our senators, and the newspapers! But why? Because, between that little palace down the street and that big palace up the street, there are still three or four persons who exist unbeknown to the public and are our real rulers! . . ."

But while the older generation was restoring absolutism, the younger generation was in despair, and continued so for three days.

Should he go to Venice, find her, talk to her? Supposing he did! What could he say, what could he propose to her? . . . Not the adventure in America! She would never consent; and the foolishness of that plan was now so patent even to him that he was ashamed of ever having talked of it. He could not marry her in Rome! He would

never have the courage to do that, at least as long as Susanna was alive. And their clandestine love? That too had become impossible. No, there was no escape from it: either kill himself—or go to Africa! But sometimes at the thought that he was never to see Elena again, he felt as if he would die of grief. He sent her telegram after telegram, crying his despair, imploring her to return, as he needed to speak to her and did not dare go to Venice. He wrote long letters, threatening that if she did not return to Rome, he would leave for Africa immediately and get himself killed. But yearning for a reply and certain that he would not get one, he raged and wept ten times a day because of her silence. The thought of suicide was constantly in his mind. He was not eating, he was not sleeping. He could not work, yet inactivity was intolerable. He seemed to be estranged from everything in the world in an abstracted stupor made up wholly of pain.

Donna Edvige scarcely let him out of her sight, and kept trying, in her growing anxiety, to wring from him the secret of his despair. She succeeded only in provoking explosions of an almost insane grief:

"Oh, let me alone! Please let me alone! I cannot tell you! I am mad! I must get away! I must go to Africa—unless you want me to end in a madhouse or to jump out of a window!"

The mother meantime did not dare confide in her husband as she had intended doing for weeks past. She feared the consequences of bringing too abruptly into contact those two obsessions, the one with its own joy, the other with its own despair. But the evening of the sixth of May came on. For three days Oliviero had been under fire and tongs, because nothing, absolutely nothing, not a word, not a sign, had come from Venice! He stormed into his mother's presence and told her in a tone of decision that now he had made up his mind to apply at the Ministry the very next day for reinstatement in active service and for work in Eritrea.

"But your father? You must talk with him first!"

Donna Edvige entrenched herself behind this last barrier because she understood that no other objection would have any effect on the boy.

"I'll see him this evening!" answered Oliviero firmly.

The mother trembled, foreseeing a clash; but then, a second later, yielding to an impulse of her sublime love, she was ready to intervene again.

"And yet . . . and yet . . ." she said. "Wouldn't it be better if I talked to him first . . . to prepare him a little. . . . Really, he isn't dreaming of any such thing! Suppose I see him tomorrow morning? . . ."

Oliviero feared the interview with his father more than he would have confessed to himself. He could ask for nothing better, and thanked his mother profusely.

Donna Edvige did not sleep that night from worry over the straits in which the boy found himself; but after long and tormenting reflection she concluded there was nothing else to do: she must arouse her husband, who was still dreaming with wide-open eyes of the splendors present and future of his marquisate. She must reveal the truth to him, because she did not feel able to meet the situation alone. The next morning, accordingly, she confronted the Marquis, who liked to be up in good season to work in his library before going to his offices.

"Augusto," she said, "it is time for us to begin thinking seriously about Oliviero. After what has happened, don't you think it would be a good idea for him to take a trip and change his mode of living for a while?"

"Yes, of course! I had thought of that. I'll arrange something for him. Say a year in Paris, a year in London, a year in Berlin, in banks of friends of ours. It will do him good to get a little experience in business. . . . It's time he began to take an interest in serious work. . . . At the same time he might get a bit of education—a course or two at the universities. . . . They wouldn't do him any harm! . . . In Paris, for example, he could go to the School of Political Sciences! . . ."

Donna Edvige looked at her husband a moment: then she shook her head, with a sigh:

"The idea is excellent; but it would have to appeal to Oliviero. I am afraid he's thinking of something quite different! . . ."

At this, her husband sat up in surprise and looked at her; and she, with all the charm she could muster, tempering the facts in apposite circumlocutions, related as best she could what Oliviero was thinking of.

She had expected some show of irritation on her husband's part, some explosion of disapproval. Instead the Marquis asked coolly enough:

"What's he want to go to Africa for?"

"That I don't know!" answered Donna Edvige, a little self-conscious. "For one thing, a sort of disgust at everything, that has been deepening in him recently. But there are other reasons—something I do not know about, something that he is hiding from me. . . . I can't manage to get hold of it. . . . For some days now, he has hardly been himself! . . ."

Alamanni thought a moment, puzzled. Then he said, emphatically, touching a bell:

"Let's have a look at him and see if we can't get this nonsense out of his head in a hurry!"

The Marquis had not expressed his real thought: "Some new tangle with Spinelli over that red-headed skirt from Venice!" And he had decided to confront the emergency with his customary decision. Donna Edvige would have preferred a maturer discussion of the matter with her husband alone; but she was not in time to halt his prompt and ready action. Nevertheless she felt somewhat reassured by her husband's calm.

In fact, when Oliviero appeared, his father addressed him quietly, cordially, almost tenderly:

"What's this idea you've got in your head, my boy? Why do you want to go to Africa?"

Africa with Oliviero was now no longer a reprisal for pain. It had become, over night, his very firm resolve.

And yet, it was still all too vague and uncertain in his mind for him to have made a rational exposition of it had he been in a position to confess all the considerations that were impelling him to such a desperate step. But he had now to reply to a very definite challenge. He seized the first plausible explanation that came to hand:

"You are always saying that Italy ought to have an empire and conquer Abyssinia. . . ."

"But I also say that the streets of Rome ought to be swept every morning! Is that any reason for the son of the Marquis Alamanni to come and tell me that he intends to turn street-sweeper?"

"You seem to forget that I am an officer."

Oliviero's tone was deferential but firm.

There were many reasons why the Marquis did not want his son to go to Africa, but the strongest at just that moment was his fear of the great tornado that he could see condensing over the Ethiopian tableland. But that reason he did not choose to give. First of all, it was a State secret. Then he was afraid it would have an effect opposite to the direction of his deeper reasons. In the third place, he always hid the real, the personal, motives of anything he said or did. He took refuge, accordingly, on a neutral but equally impregnable ground: his rights as a father and his duties as a citizen. On that ground he could answer simply and frankly: "No!"

"No, Oliviero, I am not at all forgetting that you have the fortune and the honor of belonging to our army; and if duty were calling you out there I would be the first to say, 'Go!' But you are going for some mysterious reason which you are keeping to yourself. . . . Because, frankly now, my ideas on Africa are neither your real reason nor a serious reason. Oh, of course, if you cannot, or prefer not to, disclose the true motives of your wish, I shall not ask you what they are; but I, in my turn, must answer that I am obliged to prevent you from going to Africa, also for a reason that I cannot disclose. But the reason is so serious—I let you know that at once, to

spare useless arguments—that all insistence on your part would be vain. . . ."

All this was said in such a kindly, but also in such a positive, tone that Oliviero was a little disconcerted. He was silent a moment; then he said in a certain dispirited perplexity:

"I intend to go to Africa, in order to have done with this foppish, dandified life I have been leading. I want to be useful too in some way, since I know that . . ."

"The idea is excellent, excellent!" his father hastened to comment. "All of us here in the family now have the greatest responsibilities. *Onori, oneri!* And among our responsibilities is that of saving Italy from the mire that is getting higher and higher about our ankles. But if the idea is excellent, your method of execution is mistaken. Other tasks, other duties, confront you, Oliviero. The world needs an aristocracy that knows how to manage things, the way the old one did. You must prepare yourself to become one of those who will rule Italy. . . ."

"But I haven't the slightest desire to be either a Deputy or a Senator or a Minister! Lord deliver us!" Oliviero let fall the words in sincere heat, hardly realizing what he was saying. And the father, for his part, read them in a way of his own that was not at all displeasing. He thought them the fruit of doctrines he had himself enunciated at table in days just past.

"I understand! I understand! . . . But aside from, and along with, these visible and impotent powers there are the real and hidden powers . . . Suppose, for example, you were to become a successor to ——."

And he named a friend of the family who had not appeared among the guests at the banquet, because, for that season, he was far away traveling in foreign countries, a name unknown in those days to the commonalty, which saw only surfaces, but a very potent power nevertheless. But that name, as it happened, represented in Oliviero's eyes all the great of the earth, and all the vices

and the faults of which, wrongly or rightly, he accused the great of the earth:

"No, thanks!" he said, positively. "I have no ambition to become either a visible or an invisible power."

"But why, why?" asked his father, astonished.

At this "Why?" Oliviero understood that he had to explain himself. He was convinced of his own righteousness, and his mother's presence seemed to give him courage. He threw himself headlong into the fray, but with a trembling heart:

"Because the society we live in is frivolous, corrupt, unjust, wicked. It persecutes the innocent, slanders the honest, and lets men like Accolti starve to death! If to become a power a man has to take off his hat to a Guicciarelli and a Malaguzzi I would rather be the lowest among the lowly." (His father sat listening without batting an eyelash, as rigid as a statue of stone.) Oliviero feared he had said too much, and with a nervous movement he stepped to his mother's side as though to mingle her cause with his own and to raise her as a shield between himself and his father. Then, more and more embarrassed by his own audacity and by the impassive, enigmatic calm with which his father continued to listen, he resumed, unable in his very confusion to measure either his thoughts or his words. "Must I tell you? The other evening when I saw all those people bowing, fawning, kowtowing to that Grand Duke . . . a man who maltreats that poor Duchess . . ."

But at this point his father spoke, harshly, in heat:

"His Imperial Highness, the Grand Duke Sergius, is a model of private and civic virtues. In this house, which has had the supreme honor of entertaining him, no one is permitted to recognize, much less adopt, the foul slanders which the enemies of order and society are circulating to his discredit!"

"But that evening," stammered Oliviero, pale as death, "that evening he made a scene . . ."

"That evening," interrupted the father, bringing down his fist on his knee, "His Highness did nothing he had not a right to do!"

He was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"But let's have done with this talk which stinks of socialism a mile away. Can you be thinking, by chance, of falling in with Andrea Costa's gang?"

He had uttered the words in a tone of lofty scorn. But like all men who are powers in this world Alamanni flew into a rage just when and just to the extent that it suited him, as a means of frightening in the necessary measure and direction the one who was to obey him. He had at his command a sort of tamed, domesticated anger, spontaneous and sincere enough to inspire fear, but which arose only when there was an outward reason for getting angry and a positive advantage in doing so. Even in his rage he never lost sight of the profit. His intent now was to prevent Oliviero from going to Africa. He had hurled the accusation of heresy in just such an anger, half sincere, half affected, more as a stratagem than in earnest.

But in his excitement Oliviero believed it serious. He sensed in the accusation a suggestion that he retract; and as though illumined by a sudden inspiration he answered respectfully, calmly, but firmly:

"If to hate lies, injustice, abuse of power, is socialism, then I am a socialist, as Accolti is and as mamma is!"

This time too Oliviero quailed at the moment of his greatest audacity; and after challenging his father, edged again toward his mother as though seeking her aid and protection. But he had really dared the supreme effrontery, because on just that day, his father would far rather have had his son confess to losing a million at cards or seducing a girl under the age of consent. The Marquis was now getting angry in earnest. He looked at Oliviero a moment; then, half contemptuously, half sardonically, deliberately restraining more thundering words:

"A socialist? You?"

Donna Edvige sensed the danger. She threw herself between father and son:

"Yes; but he means—as we all are more or less! He would like a little more justice and honesty in the world."

But the mother's intervention angered the father all the more. Not daring to let himself go with her, he clipped his son with a bitterer sarcasm:

"So, then, you too want to make the world over again, since the way it is made it does not meet with your approval?"

"I would like not to see so many ugly things! . . ." replied Oliviero, helplessly.

But his father exploded. That was too much! Two days after the banquet, and his son standing there talking that unctuous, hypocritical rot in that tone of voice! And his mother looking on and listening to him, with that face of a little Madonna with seven stabs in her blessèd heart!

"You, a socialist? You say that? You? And this year you have spent more than a hundred thousand lire of my money? And you make women presents of emeralds that cost ten thousand lire? Do you think I'm blind and deaf because I pretend not to see and hear? But I know all about you, understand; everything about you! And if your mother were not here, I would tell you just how you are living and just what you are doing, every day and every hour of the day. You have them all, I say—all the vices of the people you despise: you love women, horses, white nights; you are lazy; you are ignorant; you gamble; you . . ."

The anger, half spontaneous, half deliberate, was now getting out of hand of policy, and changing into a wrath wholly spontaneous and absorbing. Oliviero felt as though he were under the lash of an executioner whose fury waxed at every stroke. But though writhing under the sting of the lash, he accepted it, partly because, in his boyish eagerness to exaggerate his own faults, he considered the punishment deserved: partly because that reference to the emerald and that threatening "I know everything!" had

struck him dumb with terror. Some weeks before he had given Elena an emerald, and it had cost exactly ten thousand lire. In that pain, in that fear, he stretched out both his hands as though imploring surcease to the flagellation, admitting his guilt, offering himself for another kind of punishment.

"It's true, it's true!" . . . he cried, hoarsely. "You are right! . . . I have been a libertine and a spendthrift and an idler. That is just the reason why I want to go to Africa—to change my manner of life!"

But this humility infuriated the anger which at every exchange was more virulently engrossing the parent.

"You? You! Change your way of living? Have you ever known privation, sacrifice, a real problem? I know only too well what would happen if you went to Africa! In three months' time I would be having to find a way to get you home!"

"Let me go—and you will see whether I am the coward and the good-for-nothing you think I am!" answered Oliviero, drawing himself up.

But anger, alas, is a contagious state of mind; and in the bitter pride with which Oliviero answered this last slap, his mother could detect a first tremor of rebellion. She hastily intervened to make peace:

"No, no, no! If Oliviero went to Africa, he would do his duty! He is a soldier! You are right in not wanting him to go out there, but for the reason we were discussing the other day. I mentioned the matter to His Excellency at the party, the other evening."

"Oliviero's plan?"

"No! The letter you got from Paris!"

"You did? You did wrong, stupidly wrong!" Alamanni was glad of a chance to give his wife a little tap too.

"I didn't do wrong—nor well for that matter. His Excellency told me he already knew what was going on, but that he could do nothing, since Sonnino refuses to vote the money!"

"So I suppose you're now satisfied that it was useless

to speak to him! When will you make up your mind to see that your husband knows a thing or two about certain things?"

"You were right—that's true, unfortunately! But just on that account, I wonder whether it wouldn't be better to tell Oliviero what we know? . . ."

"A socialist?" sneered the father. "A socialist in possession of a State secret?"

His pain and his irritation were so great that he was now constrained to abuse his ungrateful son. It was solely to insult and to hurt that he had made this last objection.

Oliviero quivered under the new blow, but stood impassive as his mother, with a quick glance at him, intervened in his favor:

"Please! Please don't exaggerate! Oliviero can tell you whether I cautioned him to go slowly, when he confided in me on all these matters. . . . But even if he had fallen into a sin of heresy, should we despair of him on that account? The younger generation today all have more or less these same ideas. It's a fad that will pass, like so many others! Oliviero, furthermore, deserves a little consideration, because in these past months . . ."

"What did you want me to know, mamma?" interrupted Oliviero at this point, to cut short his mother's defense, which was conceding a little too much to the adversary.

Donna Edvige's thought was to persuade her son, not to abuse him. She did not hesitate to overstep her husband's veto:

"Some days ago they wrote to your father from Paris that all Abyssinia is rising to invade the colony this coming winter. The other evening I warned the Prime Minister; but he said he could do nothing because Sonnino would not vote the funds. . . . His attitude seemed to be: 'Danger, yes, and a grave danger, but . . . some saint will provide!' . . ."

"I know!" said Oliviero. "There's no unity of views on Africa in the Government!"

"That's why we advise against your plan," his mother

pursued quickly. "You know I am not a timid mother. If your duty ever calls you to war some day, I will not be the one to protest or to despair. But this time . . . well, it seems that, if the Cabinet cannot get together, our men will be fighting one to ten this winter!"

"All the more reason for going!" observed Oliviero quietly. "The Abyssinian horde all in arms at once would be something worth seeing!"

But this simple sincerity struck the father as a nauseating bravado:

"Right again, was I not?" he said, turning on his wife. "What did I tell you? If you showed him the real danger, he would answer: 'Danger? Then that's where I go!' Oh, these youngsters—I know them!"

He thought a moment, then shrugging his shoulders:

"For that matter, if Oliviero agrees with us, all right; if he doesn't, so much the worse! We don't gain anything by wasting time in talk. . . ." And turning to his son: "Today I am going to the Ministry of War; and I will ask him to put your application to sleep, when, and if, you make it. So long as my veto is there, any steps you may take at the Ministry will be useless. You are not going to Africa. . . ."

"But that's an abuse of your authority!" cried Oliviero excitedly.

"Oliviero!" called his mother, frightened, imploring. Where would this revolt of her unhappy boy lead?

"Abuse or no abuse," retorted the Marquis, "that is my decision, and it will hold!"

"But you are treating me like a child. I am not a minor any more! I too have the right to go where I choose, as any Italian citizen has!"

"You are of age, and you are not of age! That's where you differ from other Italian citizens. You are, and as long as I live, you will be, the son of your father. That status is not without its inconveniences, I admit. Yet it also has its advantages. Do you think you borrow the money you get so easily on the Square in Rome because

the banks admire your handwriting? Do you flatter yourself that all doors, including those of certain ladies, open to you in town because of your good looks, your wit, your brains? You went and got into that ugly mess by taking up the cudgels for the Cavalieri woman—like an idiot! And then you go and give money to her maid; and then you cut the Marquis Spinelli's throat! Well, do you think you got out of it because you were right, because your intentions were pure? If you had not been the son of your father, you'd be in jail or in the guardhouse at this very moment! I have not told you before, because I know what reliance can be placed on a son's gratitude! But since you are giving yourself certain airs, listen to me: I was the one—I and I alone! I interfered at the right time and at the right places! I have forced those whose duty it was to dig up the proofs of the innocence of that girl. If she had had to stay in jail till Count Accolti found 'the thread of the mystery,' as he promised to do! . . . And it was I—I alone—who prevented the police, the courts, and the newspapers from annoying you! Whereas you, you, went—oh, I know, because I know everything!—you went to the Comte de Barge and protested because he stayed mum! Luckily for your hide, the world is still ruled by invisible powers, and that one of those powers is your old man!"

Oliviero's patience was tried to the extreme by this harangue. For the first time he was really angry:

"Well, to come to the point, why don't you want me to go to Africa? Because you think I lack the courage?"

"Perhaps not the courage! But the nerve, yes, the spirit of sacrifice, the taste for a life of danger! You have been raised on sugarplums!"

"That may well be! But I am not convinced of it; and I am willing to make the test. I suppose I too have a right to learn how to live at my own risk and peril."

"The risk is too great!"

"And what if I choose to take it? You have no right to abuse your power to that extent! And the Minister

would be betraying his trust, if he connived with you. . . ."

"Abuse or no abuse, we are in the saddle and things go as we say! When you socialists get the reins, things will go differently!"

"They will go, I hope, a little more decently!"

"Oliviero, Oliviero!" cried his mother again.

But now the two angers were mutually inflamed. From exchange to exchange the dialogue had passed from an argument to a dispute and from a dispute to an altercation. The Marquis was now striking from the shoulder:

"That will be about enough from you! It's one thing for you to have the vices of a gentleman. I am willing to tolerate them and even—though sometimes less enthusiastically—to pay for them. But it's your idea to add to the vices of the rich the vices of the poor also, and, to be precise—rebellion and insolence toward those who have authority, proper and just authority! Well now, that—no! You would do well to remember every now and then that you are not in this world only and altogether to gratify any whims that happen to trot through your head, from emeralds for your mistresses to going and getting shot in Africa! Just so: I refuse to allow you, sole heir to my name and fortune, to go and throw away your life on account of some ridiculous caprice of yours, in a war which does not need either your strategical brilliancy or your personal heroism. . . . Now do you get that? And if I have to abuse my authority, as you put it, in order to keep you from playing the fool—well, I'll abuse it. The fortune I shall leave you will be fat enough to justify me in asking some sacrifice from you now, especially when the sacrifice I ask is for you to live here safe and happy, instead of going into a kind of Hell with the danger of never coming back again."

But that second allusion to Elena's emerald, those reproaches on account of his debts, and finally and above all else those sarcastic references to his future wealth which he had had to stand first from the Comte de Barge,

then from Pietrucci, and now from his father, fell upon Oliviero's spirit like the cut of a whip that drove his exasperation beyond all control. He was unable to think any more, unable to distinguish light from darkness. His one thought was to curse the wealth that was his torment, to spit upon it, to trample it under foot, to grind it into the mire. He had no sense of what he was saying:

"Money! Money! What do I care about money?" He gagged for a second. "What do I care about your money?" he defined more scornfully. "What do I care about your money which, as everybody knows . . ."

What everybody knew! . . . That was the terrible, the diabolical, the unforgivable insult which his desperation was about to tear from his lips.

But he did not complete the sentence. There was no need. Both his father and his mother understood. At that retort, pregnant with atrocious accusation, the son in rebellion, struck dumb by his own audacity, could see his father springing to his feet with an arm raised to strike, his mother throwing herself forward to check the blow, turning to him and calling excitedly:

"Go, Oliviero! Go! Quick! Go away!"

He shook himself from his stupor, frightened by that threatening arm, by his mother's call, and by the consciousness of his own insolence. He ran from the room, down the stairs, and down the street, away into the immensity of Rome.

His father had only raised his hand to strike. But the symbolic gesture was sufficient! It was more than the gesture of a blow on the cheek. He had been demoted to a boy, debased to an animal that may be whipped, reduced to nothing! He had said the irrevocable word!

He had revolted against his father with an insult that not all the love bestowed by all the fathers upon all the sons who had lived from the beginning of time, would be able to forget! He was now without parents, without roof, without home!

CHAPTER XIII

If Oliviero had gone to his father an hour after the quarrel and asked his pardon, he would have received an immediate and wholehearted forgiveness. Too superficial to understand the deeper motives of his son's revolt, annoyed more than at anything else at the interference the altercation made with the leaping joys of his social triumph, Alamanni was inclined, the moment the first tumult of anger had died down, to admit that he had gone too far in resenting "the usual stupidities" of his wife and his son. He thought of the dispute, in fact, as one of the usual "family rows" to be forgotten in the usual embrace, the usual pat on the back.

But Oliviero had vanished. He did not appear at luncheon. He did not appear for dinner. And no news came to break the silence which seemed to have engulfed the boy! The Marquis and Donna Edvige exchanged barely a dozen words all day and neither alluded to the absent son. Now the Marquis, disposed as he was to proclaim a general amnesty in honor of the Grand Duke—could he go chasing after the offender and hand him a pardon he had not asked for on a silver platter? But not seeing Oliviero, receiving no word from him, and refusing to ask for news, even of the mother, Alamanni could feel his anger, momentarily allayed, beginning to come to life again. His son, his own son, had dared what no one, not even his bitterest enemies, had ever dared—to tell him to his face: "What do I care for your money which, as everybody knows . . ." So! So! Insulting him for the very thing that had won the praise and admiration of the world!

However, during the forenoon of the day following came a call from the banker to whom Oliviero applied when he was short of money. Oliviero had asked for three hundred thousand lire—what do you think of that? Now "Pot-Belly" did not feel authorized to lend a sum of that importance without a special word from the secret guar-

antor. He had given twenty thousand, putting off the question of the remainder with an excuse.

"Don't you give him another penny, ever! Don't you even receive him if he comes to you again!" shouted Alamanni, excitedly, to the staggered financier. And that was a first relief to his feelings. For a second it gave him the sense of revenge—the boy was penniless.

But on maturer reflection he began to wonder why Oliviero had asked for such a large sum. Not surely to go to Africa. For that he would not need very much. Notwithstanding his resolution to leave the boy to his fate, the Marquis could not dismiss the thought from his mind. And his anxiety increased toward evening of the second day after Oliviero failed again to appear at luncheon and dinner. No matter how often he repeated to himself that he would act as if he had no son, that Oliviero was not of the slightest concern to him, he really would have liked to know where the boy was, what he was doing, why he wanted all that money. He was angry now not only at the insult, but at the lad's disappearance, which was an added insult, made as it was in reprisal to spite him, if not to worry him, to show that neither father nor family mattered in the least!

But the morning of the third day Castelnuovo came in. Oliviero was in Venice! He had set out in company with Sabina, the famous Sabina, the most disputed courtesan in Rome! He had promised to spend two hundred thousand lire with her and then to give her another hundred thousand as a present when he was through!

This time the Marquis went into a passion in earnest. This new outrage was crueler, more deliberate, than the first! Leaving on a gay party, and with those projects of irresponsible prodigality, after doing what he had done! Had the world ever seen a more undutiful son? No, no punishment was adequate for such insolence. The cuff he had threatened to bestow was child's play! Hatred, rather, eternal, implacable, inexorable, one of those hatreds which are a kind of revenge in themselves, in their

very intensity! That only would fit a crime so great. Son? He had no son! He did not care where Oliviero was, how he was, what he was doing. He would disinherit the rascal, to the limit of the law and beyond the limit of the law! Let him go to Eritrea if he liked! He had not spoken, he would not speak with the Minister of War! If the scamp asked for reinstatement, let it go through! It would serve him right if the Minister granted it and he got into trouble out there! The Marquis was hurt so deeply to the quick, that this time he could not control himself. Despite his resolve never to mention the boy's name again, he had to have relief, revenge, consolation. The mother should know of this second insult which aggravated the first! At luncheon, suddenly, when the servants had left the room, he turned to Donna Edvige and abruptly, without preamble:

"Do you know what your son did day before yesterday, the moment he was out of here? He tried to get three hundred thousand lire at the bank. Then he went to Venice with one of those women . . . the most expensive to be had in Rome! . . . That's the way a socialist aspires to poverty!"

Among Donna Edvige's virtues was a heroic dissimulation of her own griefs. Unable to tell a lie, she had nevertheless, from the day of her engagement to Alamanni, managed to deceive everybody. No one had even suspected that vague, inexplicable, but none the less terrible, fear of marriage and of her husband, which, during those days when every one was congratulating her, had at times made her pray to God for the supreme grace of a sudden death. And in her long and sublime deception of the world, in the years that followed, she had become so accustomed to keeping her afflictions to herself that it had never even occurred to her, the confidante of the sorrows of others, to confide any one of her pains to another human being, even among her dearest and nearest. But this time—and for the first time in her life—she felt the need of help and

advice. The conflict had broken with such sudden violence that she had lost her bearings, and anxiously she wondered what would become of all three of them.

The very afternoon of the quarrel, she ran to Accolti and told him everything.

"Where is Oliviero?" asked Accolti, sorrowfully.

"I don't know. He has left the house. He did not come home for luncheon!"

"We must try to find him. I will look around myself. For the moment nothing else can be done."

On returning home Donna Edvige learned from the servants that Oliviero had entered the palace toward four o'clock, while she was away, shut himself up in his room for a half hour, and then gone out again, leaving a letter for her:

"Dear Mamma," it read. "Forgive me for what I have done. I think it better to absent myself for a time. Don't worry! I will keep you informed as to my movements. Good-by—love, kisses. Oliviero."

So then, the boy was thinking of traveling! Donna Edvige sent word to Accolti; but said nothing to her husband of the little note. She was afraid that Oliviero's asking forgiveness of her without mention of his father would make matters worse. But the next day Oliviero announced his arrival in Venice by wire and promised to write, without, however, giving his address. Donna Edvige was now frightened indeed: the boy's flight was a protest against the father, just as the father's silence was a protest against the son. Each stood immovable in the same conviction that he was in the right, that he was the one aggrieved.

Her impulse was to interpose at once, warn the Marquis that Oliviero had run away, hurry off in pursuit herself. But Accolti advised her to wait till Oliviero's letter came or till the Marquis himself broke silence—this he could not long delay doing, he loved that "socialist" too well!

Accolti was not mistaken. The father broke the ice at the end of the third day. Pained as Donna Edvige felt, she rushed quickly to her son's defense:

"Oliviero was sincere when he told me he wanted to lead a simpler life. But you reproved him so harshly for being a wastrel and a good-for-nothing, that he lost his head. Oliviero is in Venice. He telegraphed me yesterday. I shall go and get him!"

Alamanni was himself secretly afraid that he had spoken too sharply. But he would not have allowed any one else to tell him so. Now, however, it was Donna Edvige who had spoken. He controlled himself by cutting the discussion short:

"Do what you choose! I wash my hands of that boy and of everything that concerns him. He may be right. I may be wrong! But when two people do not speak the same language, it is useless to waste time in talk. Tomorrow I leave on the election tour I promised to make in the interest of the Government."

"This business is not so simple!" said Accolti, when Donna Edvige again turned to him. "The Marquis may have been too severe; but this folly on Oliviero's part can hardly be just a retaliation against his father. You are right, there is something else underneath. But again I say: wait! You cannot rush off to Venice and go looking for your son from hotel to hotel, at the risk of having to deal with a woman of that species at any moment. Supposing I go on, and reconnoiter!"

Finally, on the eleventh of May, the long-expected letter arrived, brief, constrained in style, vague. Oliviero admitted that he had been rude and was sorry for it; but he did so coldly, excusing himself on the ground that he had been out of sorts for some time. That was why he preferred to travel about a little. He would spend two or three weeks in Venice, then move on, he did not know just where. His mother need not write until a wire should tell her where to address her letters. Meantime, she must

not worry—he was all right! He did not say where he was living.

"Be patient two or three days more," said Accolti, who had applied for a leave in order to go to Venice. "I shall return from Venice with more satisfactory news!"

Donna Edvige was still in time to show the letter to the Marquis before the latter's departure. He read it and returned it to her without a word. But Donna Edvige could not sit waiting with idle hands for Accolti's departure and return. She wrote a letter to Oliviero describing her anxiety, and imploring him to give her a sure address for communicating with him. She did not speak of his father. She did not mention the quarrel. She did not reproach him for anything he had done or was doing. She pretended not to know what she knew and to believe that he was traveling alone, accompanied only by his sorrow.

The letter she sent to the prefect of Venice, asking him to find Oliviero wherever he was living and see that he got it. But the next day a telegram came in from Milan.

"On my way to Paris. Best love. Am well. Don't worry! Oliviero."

Regretting now that she had not followed her own first impulse to go to Venice at once, Donna Edvige sent for Accolti. To trace a young man in Venice seemed fairly easy—but in Paris? Accolti reassured her:

"Unfortunately, it is harder for me to go to Paris. That trip would take me at least a week or ten days. Will the Minister give me that much leave? I am afraid not. But to find Oliviero's address in Paris is not so difficult as you suppose. Do you know any one at the embassy? The Ambassador perhaps? There are ten thousand hotels in the city, but Oliviero has not buried himself away in any out-of-the-way boarding-house. He will be found in

one of the fashionable places in the neighborhood of the Opera. If he chose to, the Ambassador could find him in the course of one forenoon. Write to the Ambassador!"

Donna Edvige thought the idea a good one, but the situation was not any clearer to her. Why that unexpected leap from the lagoons to the French capital? Oliviero had talked of staying for some days in Venice and of not knowing where he would go from there. What was he thinking of? What did he want? What was he doing? And underneath this puzzle lay the other—the puzzle of puzzles, to which everything that had happened was bound as by a chain of mysteries; why had Oliviero so violently and so suddenly, from one day to the next, thrown himself headlong into that notion of going to Africa? Donna Edvige could find no inkling of an answer! Meantime, on the fourteenth of May came another laconic telegram. Oliviero had reached Paris. He was well. He gave no address.

Fortunately something more cheerful occurred in just those days to distract Donna Edvige from her worries. On the fifteenth of May, the Law finally ventured to declare that Marietta Sorbi was innocent, ordering her release and remanding Gaetano Donzetti to the Assizes for trial.

The next morning Accolti went in Donna Edvige's carriage and brought Marietta from the Mantellate prisons to the Alamanni palace, and thence, laden with Donna Edvige's gifts and caresses, to the little convent on the Celio. Preceded by a plump, smiling nun, the impersonation of sympathetic understanding, Marietta climbed the stairs to the first floor, reached a landing where the Law, half jailer, half nurse, sat dozing in the person of a policeman in front of a door, opened the door and entered a large, sunny room, bright and bare. In the center, under a crucifix, stood a little iron bed; and on the bed, propped on many pillows, in a gown that shone white even amid the white linen, lay a wan, shadowy figure with two great

eyes that seemed to be ablaze with the final consumption of that poor frame.

"Oh, Signora, my Signora!" cried Marietta, sinking to her knees at the bedside.

"Marietta, dear, dear Marietta!"

Loyalty was in tears of loving veneration before the Misfortune for which she had suffered; and Misfortune was bestowing on Loyalty a reward more precious than any treasure: the last caress of a grateful heart. Up there on His Cross hung the Christ looking down upon these sacred effusions; and at that moment not even Accolti, with his transcendent ear, could hear on His lips the reproach He had addressed to the Pharisees of Success: "Ye knaves! Ye rascals!" What even Accolti heard on His lips were words of infinite sweetness filled with infinite love: "My unhappy daughters! You at least understand that I hang crucified here at the hands of a royal executioner, and by sentence of a royal court!"

But when Susanna added in a hoarse voice: "Poor Marietta! How much you have been through on my account!" Marietta raised her head, looked at her mistress a moment and then said, resolutely:

"No, Signora! People have been so good to me!"

And, in fact, she was so touched by the kindnesses that Accolti and Donna Edvige had heaped upon her and by their gratitude and Susanna's, that the horrors she had undergone seemed to her almost like a great good fortune. As Donna Edvige looked at Marietta, half radiant from the very enormity of the injustice she had suffered, she could not help reflecting that that same injustice had been the first cause of her son's revolt. But she felt no bitterness. Her spirit was, on the contrary, flooded with a sort of maternal tenderness for Marietta, as though that community of destiny had made the girl in a sense her daughter. That Marietta had no complaint and felt no rancor for her sufferings was a final proof of her goodness. But her persecutions were none the less an offense

against the eternal foundations of righteousness: Oliviero had done only his duty in defending her, even at the risk of going too far!

And to Loyalty it was vouchsafed to sit watch at the bedside of dying Innocence and close her eyes! Inflexible Justice found a way to be softened by that agony and to pretend not to recognize in the new maid at the convent, whose salary and board Donna Edvige paid, Susanna's former maid, suspected of complicity in Susanna's crime!

After the telegram of the fourteenth, Oliviero gave no sign of himself; but the Italian embassy in Paris easily discovered the hotel where he was living, and reported it as one of the most expensive and luxurious. Donna Edvige, somewhat relieved, immediately forwarded the letter she had written to Venice and which the prefect had returned to her. But Accolti, meantime, did not succeed in obtaining the week's leave he needed for the trip to Paris. He gave up that plan, accordingly; and when Donna Edvige was again tempted to go herself, he suggested rather that she ask her husband to send some trustworthy person to survey the ground.

"What could you do in Paris," he said, "unless your husband has come to some decision? Oliviero cannot return home until his father has forgiven him."

Donna Edvige wrote to her husband, though doubting that he would consent. "He has been too deeply hurt!" she thought.

But who could look into the impenetrable dark of that complicated soul? Not even Donna Edvige!

The Marquis Alamanni did not leave for northern Italy on the tenth of May, but two days later. During those two days he lingered in Rome on various pretexts, but really in order to deal with a last cruel paroxysm of hesitation. His first impulse, after learning of Oliviero's flight, was to let his son apply for service in Africa or anywhere else if he chose, and if the Minister agreed— "So much the better! So much the better! It will serve him right!"

But every human creature has his weaknesses; and this man "so full," as a writer of the Cinquecento might have put it, "so full of happy temerity," had his weaknesses too. Boldness itself among the risks and perils of his own world of business, he lacked physical courage—he was afraid of guns, weapons, exploding things, and of any activity in which he risked physical damage. Now whenever he tried to imagine his son in Africa, in the thick of a skirmish or a battle, with bullets falling around him, he would shudder as though he himself were there. In vain he strove not to think of the matter, to separate his son from himself, to repel him with all the violence of his anger. For two or three days he fought the temptation to go to the Ministry to provide for the vetoing of any application Oliviero might make. It was to flee that temptation that he had decided to leave Rome on the tenth. But at the crucial moment, he could not muster the courage to go north with that burden on his mind. He went to the Minister and presented the matter, but in his own way. He never lost his head even in his irritations and he was always a master in the art of making a merit even of the favors he asked. Oliviero, a born patriot, like everybody in the family, was chafing to go to Africa to help found the great empire of the New Italy! Now he, the boy's father, was proud of this noble impulse of his son's, but yet he felt obliged to temper it with the wisdom of his own gray head. It would be better for the boy to prepare himself a little more thoroughly. Would not the Minister, therefore, if Oliviero made any application, kindly tell him that the Government would keep him in mind and let him know the moment there was a good vacancy; but meantime refrain from granting the application until he, the father, had given the word?

The Minister consented. Alamanni felt free to leave for the north.

For a week he traveled up and down the valley of the Po, everywhere in the thick of the electoral campaign. But neither the excitement of the combat, nor the monuments

created by his wealth, nor the intoxicating pride he could take in the exercise of his power, could cure him of a new malady that seemed to have laid hold on him—a strange languishing of that will of his which had always been tension, ardor, impatience, complete fullness of joy in action. Vainly he tried to banish his son forever from his presence, from his mind, from his heart. In spite of the twofold outrage he did not succeed. For the first time this man, who had never failed to punish a slight, discovered—and the discovery seemed to turn his cosmos upside down—that there are insults that cannot be avenged. It was not so much the unlucky words which his son had uttered: however much they hurt him, the real offense, the offense he could neither forgive nor punish was that Oliviero had betrayed the father's dynastic ambitions—and for those stupid reasons! Had Oliviero committed one of those crimes which demonstrate audacity and power, the Marquis might have taken some comfort—he could still have hoped! But the boy had ruined himself with society, gone and done all those other idiotic things, destroyed in a few weeks of nonsense the careful work of two generations—and why? To defend truth, to uphold justice, which he claimed had been transgressed in the persons of two women, and one of them a servant girl! . . .

Shame, despair, rage, and not against his son only, as the Marquis thought it all over again! What was the use of fooling oneself? That boy was not the exuberant sturdy stump on which he, the Marquis, on being cut down, would one day sprout up again with all his old ardor and genius! Oliviero was the child, and would be the continuation, of the mother rather, another sort of being, sprung from a different breed with which he could never come to an understanding. Precisely: Donna Edvige! Why had he ever fallen in love with her? Why had he ever married her? Why had he united himself with that hostile breed which he did not understand and which did not understand him? Yes, yes, the one real folly,

and the one great mistake of his life—that love and that marriage! Why, why, in deference to her had he given up that inimitable life of danger and daring that was his of old? What great things he would have accomplished if he had been faithful to himself! Single-handed he would have made a new Italy, single-handed an epoch in history, equaling the most powerful magnates of gold in the richest countries, becoming one of the rulers of the world, one of the pillars of his day and age! Every day as he looked over his shoulder, he would see there behind his back, in a kind of retrospective exaltation too long delayed, some "big idea," some ambition great and new, which had fallen buried under the mediocrity of routine existence—and not through any fault of his! Yes, he too had found his Delilah, and she had shorn his locks, a Delilah insidiously disguised under a cloak of purity! During his marriage he had grown "soft," there! He had softened under the elegances, the good manners, the punctilios of that worldly respectability which abhors and fears everything that is not mediocre, because it is loath to offend any one—and nothing offends mediocrity so much as greatness! Alas, yes, what was he but a servile copy of "My Lord Clown" and "My Lord Hand-to-Mouth"? He had grasped at the shadows which satisfied their puny natures—titles, honors, coats-of-arms—and in doing so he had let fall the magnificence and the power which he already held in his hand!

Two men had dwelt together inside him for so many years, mutual friends and yet always at war, making him a being as contradictory in his coherences as he was coherent in his contradictions. Ambitious, he would have ruled the world, yet, vain, he admired and flattered it to satisfy a craving for admiration and flattery. Contemptuous of men, esteeming himself only, he was the disingenuous adulator of Power. Insatiable, he had always something to ask of his fellow men, yet he was also the satisfied man who asked the whole world to laugh when he laughed. The ambitious, the haughty, the insatiable,

the violent man of the early days—the stronger of the two by nature—had the better, on the whole, of the vain, the fawning, the satisfied, the shrewd individual who had gradually developed a little each year under the encouragements, the flatteries, and the favors of time and of society; but it had the better of the fight only to vent itself in a sort of reborn rancor against Donna Edvige, the ultimate cause of Alamanni's lamentable failure to attain the supreme triumphs that were his by destiny!

At that moment Alamanni really considered his life as a failure. What did he care about being a marquis, now that he had lost hope of ever founding a dynasty? His impulse now was to leave Rome, shut himself up in one of his villas in the north, throw himself headlong into business again as he had done when he was young, anticipate the times, make ready for the future, electrify the valley of the Po, give light, movement, work, wealth to all of northern Italy—in a word, find himself again! But, alas, alas! Time had not passed in vain even for him! There he was, more than sixty years old! And, alas, alas, he too had learned to love! The great humanitarian century in which he had been born, even if half infidel the first really Christian era of the world, had gently, subtly, unbeknown to him, seeped into his blood, to soften his fiber, irrevocably, irrevocably to melt even his jasper heart with the invisible omnipotence of Love. Along with the prolongation of his own fortune beyond the grave, along with the dynasty which would perpetuate him and through which he would be able to ask honors and favors of the world even after death, he had learned, gently, subtly, unbeknown to himself, to love Oliviero, in and for Oliviero —he had learned, that is, to enjoy a capacity for sacrificing himself for another being dearer to him than himself and whose joys were sweeter and whose sorrows were bitterer than his own joys and sorrows. He realized this for the first time now that a violent blow had suddenly struck apart the two loves hitherto confused! He could find his old self again, but that former self now came

forth with a wounded love in its heart, a love that bled more grievously even than his disappointed ambition. That boy gone, there was an emptiness in his world and in his life which no anger, no scorn, not even the feverish activity of his youth, even were he able to be young again, could ever fill! He had vowed he would have nothing more to do with Oliviero! Yet here he was thinking only of him, and with an anxiety different perhaps from Donna Edvige's, but no less acute and besetting!

According to Castelnuovo, Oliviero had boasted that he would spend two hundred thousand lire on his trip with that woman and he had undertaken to make her a present of a hundred thousand on their return! Two hundred and one hundred—the very three he had vainly sought at the bank! Where had he found, where did he expect to find, such a sum? What insane devices might the need of money not suggest to him, his honor pledged in promises lightly made, and feelings of jealousy being perhaps involved?

In the quarrel with his son, the Marquis had not referred to that affair of the emerald without full knowledge of what he was talking about. Some weeks before he had chanced to meet the Countess Asterio at the Bank of Italy. The Countess had taken off her gloves to sign some papers. Chatting idly of one subject and another Alamanni had asked permission to admire a glorious emerald that was sparkling on the ring-finger of the beautiful widow's right hand.

"It is a present a Shah of Persia made to my grandmother," said Elena, taking off the ring and handing it to him. "My grandfather was Russian minister at Teheran, you know."

But Alamanni had noticed a date inscribed in French inside the circle of gold, "*27 décembre, 1830.*" He remembered that date. He recognized the ring! It was the very one a jeweler in Rome had offered him three months before, when he was out shopping for a wedding present!

Why had the Asterio woman thought it necessary to

invent the little fib about the Shah, he asked himself, his suspicions aroused. And some days later, he had a talk with the jeweler and learned that Oliviero had bought the ring two months before.

Alamanni doubted no longer. It was a case of love and jealousy. The Asterio woman was the cause of the boy's headlong decision to rush off to Africa!

And this conclusion was confirmed by the information he gleaned in the days following the quarrel. The Countess Asterio had left Rome for Venice. From Venice she had written to Donna Edvige that she was intending to take a long rest at her place at Conegliano—she was tired, unhappy! She needed quiet, solitude, a chance to pull herself together! Meantime gossip in Rome had it that sooner or later Elena Asterio would marry the Marquis Giulio Spinelli del Galuzzo! Might she not have deserted Oliviero to marry Spinelli? Oliviero had already given his rival that nasty clip with a sword! Now all these crazy notions and crazier actions—were they not jealousy, revenge?

But in that case—danger, a very, very grave danger indeed! And no matter how often the Marquis assured himself that Oliviero could go where and do what he chose, that it all made no difference to him, he would always come back to the thought of that danger. . . . The son he loved, the heir for whom he had prepared so many treasures, so many splendors, going to ruin through one of those follies so easy to boys of his age, when a blind passion exasperates the need of money! . . . No, no, he could not think of such a thing. The mere thought of it made him shudder! He could not do what he wanted to do—get revenge. He did not want to do what he could do —forgive! For those days he swayed between a prompting to put a custodian at his son's elbow, and a point of pride that bade him dismiss the ungrateful, rebellious wretch from his mind.

Donna Edvige's letter gave the needed impetus to his heart's desire. Yes, he would send some one to Paris.

He sent for Castelnuovo to hurry north from Rome, armed him with letters of introduction, with instructions, with money, and charged him to go first to Venice to make inquiries about Oliviero's sojourn there, and thence to Paris, to see what Oliviero was doing.

CHAPTER XIV

How and why he had come to take flight in that fashion and in that company, Oliviero would not have been able to say himself. When he answered his father's call that morning, he had not the slightest thought of revolt. He had intended merely—without disclosing things he could not reveal to any one—to convince his father that he was serious in his intention of going to Africa. And for an hour he had allowed himself to be maltreated without protest. . . . How at last, for the flash of a second, he had lost his bearings and uttered an insult which had never entered his head before—he could not imagine! At times it seemed as though those words had been spoken by some one else. Indeed, the moment he had left the house, could he have guessed that by running back and throwing himself at his father's feet he could have obtained forgiveness, he would have done so on the instant.

But he could not have guessed such a thing. He himself, as he fled, judged the insult so insulting as to preclude all hope of pardon. The very horror he felt for his mistake impelled him to flight. But as his despair deepened before the irreparable quality of his act, his resentment against the cruelty with which he had been treated also began rapidly to grow in an instinctive impulse of defense. Of all the injustices he had endured, that indeed was the greatest! He had gone to his father repentant and resolved to lead a better life. Instead, just because he was penitent and intended to redeem his past,

his father had thrown his past in his face, derided his intentions and hopes, denied his spirit of sacrifice, the seriousness of his purposes, even his courage! He had told him that all he was good for was to make debts!

For a moment, he thought of going to Accolti: but shame at having to confess a fault held him back. He was all alone now! He had no parents, no home, no occupation, no friend, no woman who loved him! He could not stay in Rome, banished as he was from his own house! For that matter he did not care to stay, even for a day —he would go away that very evening without seeing any one, without being obliged to explain even to Accolti why he was going. But where could he go, now that the one place he would have chosen to seek was closed to him by an arrogant veto on his father's part?

For a time various projects drifted through his troubled mind, and he would work them out . . . when, all of a sudden, an idea, a strange idea, occurred to him —a strange and a wicked idea—his conscience told him so at once: going away in that company on top of such insolence toward his father! But just then he needed to hold some purpose in view, whatever it might be. He needed distraction, company in which he would not be obliged to discuss his troubles. Loneliness therefore began subtly to argue with Conscience—arbiter, the bitter desire he felt to debase himself in his own misery. Had he not tried to redeem himself? And they had told him he was good only for roistering! Since that was his reputation, at least he ought to deserve it! He would go away! He would do all the wild things he could think of! Then, at least, his father would have the satisfaction of not having insulted him in vain! And that treacherous woman—well, he could hit her too through the courtesan. . . . For Elena too deserved her lesson!

He argued the pros and cons for a while; then suddenly, he jumped into a carriage and drove to Sabina's place—Castelnuovo had introduced him to her some evenings before.

"What good wind blows you here, at this hour, Alamanni?" said the beautiful hetaira, a roguish smile playing about her big, black eyes.

Though she was a little surprised, her curiosity was aroused. This was the first visit Oliviero had paid her and at an hour, to tell the truth, somewhat unconventional! Her maid, furthermore, told her that Oliviero, evidently in great excitement, insisted on seeing her at once on most urgent business—omitting of course to tell her that the young man had given her fifty lire to swallow her "buts" and show immediate results.

"I have come to make you a proposition!" said Oliviero, losing no time in preambles. "Are you willing to take a trip with me? We leave this evening for Venice. From Venice we go to Paris, Aix-les-Bains, St. Moritz, the North Cape, wherever you say. You get everything you ask for—clothes, jewels, theater tickets, money to play the tables. When we get back there will be a present for you—fifty, a hundred thousand, lire—whichever you say. Will you?"

"Few words, but clear, eh?" answered the beautiful mercenary, smiling diffidently. She could not make up her mind whether to take the strange offer seriously. "That's what you call speed! So you were Vesuvius all the time! You sleep peacefully—you look harmless; but then, one fine morning . . . bing, bang, boom . . . run for your lives!"

"But will you? There's no time to lose! I leave this evening. You must give me an answer now: yes or no! . . ."

The girl looked at him a moment doubtfully, half wary, half playful. Then she said:

"But, Alamanni, are you in earnest or are you joking?"

"I am always in earnest. . . . At least when I am talking with a woman I want!"

"But your approach is not so very subtle!" whispered the beautiful hetaira with a pout that feigned offense. "Is that your way with a poor woman—pointing a pistol at

her chest? I need time to catch my breath, think things over, get ready. . . . My clothes—I can't run off like some servant girl—just tossing four rags into a trunk! . . ."

"Whatever you need we can get on the road."

"I have a friend!" she came back, with more positive force, "and he's not treating me badly—as you know! Well, I must talk with him first, persuade him to let me go. I'm sure he won't object, because he's a nice man, and really, really loves me—he's not like so many others! When I want a thing, he never refuses! . . . But just for that reason, I'm not going to do him dirt—running off, you might say, secretly. Can't we wait a few days? One day more, one day less . . ."

"I can't! I leave for Venice this evening!"

"You are in a hurry, aren't you! And if I don't accept, what will you do? Go alone?"

"If you don't accept, I'll make the same proposition to another girl, some one who knows her own mind a little better!"

"Who will she be?"

"You'll know that tomorrow if you refuse!" Oliviero was inventing on the spur of the moment.

"You're a beast!" cried Sabina suddenly flaring up. "And you're a crook! You don't know how to speak to a decent woman! You can't refuse to give me time to think. I'm not the goose you take me for. . . . Would I be fool enough to compromise myself by saying point blank, 'Coming! Coming!' Why, you haven't paid the slightest attention to me before. . . . Certain things have to come of themselves, without effort . . ."

Oliviero's ideas were by now fairly clear: he would follow Elena to Venice, parade his new mistress up and down the lagoons and with so much noise that Elena would hear of it. And he had begun by offering treasures he did not possess. Whetted by grief and resentment, that folly of largess which was always dragging Oliviero into imprudent generosities was about to make another pirou-

ette. But meantime the beautiful instrument which Venus was to supply to Vengeance was placed in a fine predicament of her own. That Oliviero was rich, very rich, Sabina knew in a general sort of way. But she also knew, from experience, that if in love your older man frequently gives more than he promises, your youngster almost always promises more than he can give. This offer was too sudden, too munificent, too out of the ordinary! But it threw her into a cold sweat just to think that such an opportunity might prove to be serious and to have slipped from her hand. No! No! That crazy loon had to give her "time to think things over," as she said—"time to look things up," she really meant. And she followed the tack she had chosen, now caressing, now showing fight, now cursing, now whimpering, now threatening, now imploring. But Oliviero was immovable. He consented to specify a little more clearly only on a few points: he was willing to spend, over a trip of three months, two hundred thousand lire. The woman who went with him would get a cool hundred thousand at the end of that time. But he also specified that he would reserve a berth on the express for Venice that evening and that he would wait for her at the station: if she did not show up he would go alone, and the next day send a certain telegram to a certain girl, who, quicker of wit than Sabina, would not let such an opportunity slide!

Yet, the moment he had left the woman's door, Oliviero was forced to realize that he had pledged himself to spend three hundred thousand lire, and that he had perhaps a hundred lire in his pocket if he had that much. But that did not trouble him long—he drove straight to "Pot-Belly," the Countess Maria's Platonic seducer, and confided, simply enough, that he needed three hundred thousand lire, and needed them at once!

"*Gesummaria!*" cried the banker, arching his hands above his head as though the ceiling were about to fall. "Why, that amount of money, not the Pope, not the King

of Italy, could raise in Rome at a moment's notice in times like these!"

Twenty thousand, yes! But he stuck at that! The boy could not persuade him to produce a centime more.

Oliviero pocketed the twenty thousand, but he found himself in an ugly fix. He had come out of the conference with virtually empty hands. After all the promises and all the bragging he had ventured in Sabina's presence, he could not leave with such a pittance! What a sorry figure he would cut with that stunning beauty!

But all of a sudden he remembered: a box at the bottom of a chest, under a pile of old papers! The great scoop he had made that evening when he had gone to the gambling club on not finding Accolti at home! But he shuddered with self-loathing! That money? That money? Besides, in order to get it, he would have to go home! But his present mood was well able to deal with any scruples of conscience. What had he ever got out of all his good resolutions? Out of all his ethical niceties? Out of all his consideration for others? It was filthy lucre, but well suited to that particular purpose and to that particular woman! And he had to get away. He now felt pledged to Sabina. His father and his mother were never at home at four o'clock!

He went home at that hour, unearthed his treasure, again found the bracelet he had bought for Elena. Yes, he would take that too! It would be his first gift to Sabina! What he did not take was the four thousand lire which Accolti had restored to him. No, he could not profane that sacred relic, that emblem of an heroic sacrifice!

As he went to the station that evening, he was curious to see whether Sabina would really come. On the whole, he hoped she would, not because he liked her better than any other woman—she was the woman nearest at hand! He would leave with her at once, and be saved the trouble of looking up another!

Sabina was a girl from the working classes, born and brought up in a janitor's basement in Milan. Her parents

had early realized that she was not what you would call stupid, and they decided, eking out their tips with the labor of hands and arms, to make a school-teacher of her. Sabina might have alarmed more perceptive parents by her precocious theoretical mastery of subjects young girls are supposed to be ignorant of. But however unperceptive, her janitor parents were honest, hard-working people, cut somewhat on old-fashioned lines. They suspected no danger, but they watched their daughter as they would have watched any other girl—with an eagle's eye, that is—and Sabina, accordingly, as far as normal school, "went straight."

But during her junior year in that institution, when she was just eighteen, a girl friend older and more experienced took hold of her and piloted her into the pathways where her real vocation lay. And vocation triumphed over parental deformation.

After a year of furtive visits to a house which belonged neither to her nor to the nondescript strangers she met in it, Sabina one fine day abandoned family and basement lodgings to become a lady—not by virtue of the diploma her parents had set their hopes on, but by going to live with the son of a rich merchant, who had fallen sincerely in love with her. In the still modest affluence which this heir-apparent could offer her through the kinks in the parental purse-strings, Sabina had acquired something suggesting a society manner which she could mix with the smattering of education she had brought away from normal school. At the end of two years she could call her wings full grown and she proved as much by taking flight, deserting her callow lover, large of heart but tight of purse, for the protection of a maturer man. In the profession of love she had made, in short, as people say, a position for herself. But not a soul! Legend has it that in certain older civilizations of the Far East and in certain countries of the West where flirting is an ancient art, the profession of love softens and refines the women who practice it. It did not have that

effect on Sabina. She was by temperament a wild untamable girl of the people, greedy, selfish, coarse, impervious to polish. The jewels, the furs, the silks, the flatteries, earned in this career with little effort, had tended to exasperate her native defects, adding to them a certain dose of capricious, half-brutal impulsiveness.

The moment Oliviero was out of sight Sabina rushed for advice to her friends—her protector included; and they without exception united in the same counsel. Alamanni? The son of the Senator? Of the banker? The man they had just made a Marquis? . . . One of those strokes of good luck that come just once in a lifetime and woe to the woman who lets it pass by! Why, the Marquis Alamanni was the richest man in Italy and one of the richest in the world! Sabina shouldn't play the fool! There was a fortune in it!

Her protector was the most emphatic of all. For one thing, he was running a little short of cash, and a few months for recuperation would not come amiss. Then again, a broker himself, son of a rural business man, he was quite flattered to be doing a favor to the son of a real magnate, even if the favor were the loan for a few weeks of the brunette courtesies of his beautiful Sabina! What are people in this world for, except to do a good turn now and then to those who deserve it?

But the more her friends insisted on this counsel of wisdom, the angrier Sabina grew, screaming that—no, she would not accept, she would not go; that no one, not even the richest man in Rome, could put "the bargain in her hand and the knife at her throat" in that fashion. Your young Mr. Alamanni could take his millions and go learn how to treat a lady, especially "ladies who have a position and a reputation in the world." And all day long she abused her maid, and kicked at her dog and cat, seizing every pretext to vent a temper more irascible and capricious than usual. Her woman's pride had been flouted by the straightforward brutality of the offer. She could not be sure the youthful Alamanni would make good

his boast. Yet there in the offing were those hundreds of thousands of lire, two to spend, and one to have at the end, to say nothing of being on speaking terms with the fabulous millions of the Alamannis!

But as evening came on, still protesting that Signor Alamanni did not know the A B C's of the art of courting women, that his manners were as beastly as a Turk's, a Bedouin's, a Zulu's, an Abyssinian's, she finally "tossed four rags into a trunk" and made for the station accompanied by one maid, where she arrived, breathless, panting, in a state of half collapse, a few minutes before train-time.

Oliviero was waiting in the rotunda. The quiet offhand manner in which he welcomed her was for Sabina a first affront.

"Why, not even if he had been having me for six months!" she thought.

But the strangest surprise of all awaited her as, proud of that prerogative, she entered a stateroom and lifted her two black eyes to the empty luggage-racks.

"But your bags?" she asked Oliviero.

"I haven't any!"

"You haven't any?"

"I always travel light! I buy as I go along!" And Oliviero smiled, enjoying rather than not the lady's scandalized stupor. Sabina, the famous Sabina, appearing the next morning at a fashionable hotel with a companion who had only the clothes on his back! Was she, Sabina, the famous Sabina, traveling with a beggar?

"You are joking!" she persisted, incredulous.

"No, I'm not joking, I'm not joking!"

And he pulled from his left pocket a huge leather wallet crammed to the bursting point, and slapped it resonantly with a wide-opened palm! "Here's my baggage! With this little trunk to travel with I imagine I can get along!"

Sabina's first flash was one of extreme bad temper. She vowed she would get out of that train and go straight

home. But she repressed that thought. She couldn't admit defeat without more of a fight than that! Then again, the well-cushioned sound of that palm on that thick purse had somewhat reassured her.

The train started, but she was not easy in her mind—curiosity, curiosity! . . . But bedtime came at last, when God willed. She got into bed and closed her eyes as tight as she could close them. But she could not have been more awake behind those two pretty, motionless eyelids! And when she was sure, quite sure, that Oliviero was asleep, she rose, took the leather purse which he had carelessly thrown with his hat on a rack and opened it. . . .

O solace of a soul in torment! Imagine a sort of book, where every page was a thousand-lire bill! She did not dare to count them—it would have taken too long! She just ran over the edges quickly with a forefinger! There they were, yes, oh, so many, so many of them! But at a certain moment, her fingers snipped at one of them, and out it came! And quick as scat, there it was, folded up and deftly stowed away in her corsage!

She put the little "trunk" back on its rack, lay down again, turned over on her side, and this time went to sleep with her spirit at rest:

"But, oh," she thought, "these millionaires! What mean, stuck-up things they are, the lot of them! If poor folks only had more money! Their manners are so nice!"

CHAPTER XV

Alamanni had ordered Castelnuovo to keep Donna Edvige informed as to what he discovered, in as great detail as possible; and on the twenty-eighth came his first report on Oliviero's sojourn in Venice.

The boy had arrived there without luggage, and for three days had amused himself without attracting much

attention, spending most of his time in the shops replenishing his wardrobe. Suddenly, without warning, he had set out for Paris in company with a certain Count Nallini, apparently an acquaintance of Sabina, who had introduced them.

"Count Nallini?" said Accolti. "Who can he be? He looks to me, I can't say why, like an impostor."

Why Oliviero had gone to Venice and why he had left so hastily, not even Castelnuovo had succeeded in discovering.

But finally on the twenty-ninth, Oliviero gave a sign of life in a long-awaited answer to his mother's letter. He admitted mistakes, but excused them. His father had driven him from Rome—let the veto be removed and he, Oliviero, would leave at once for Africa: if he had to be a coxcomb, he would never set foot in Rome again.

By the beginning of June Castelnuovo's letters began to grow more frequent. He was now staying at Oliviero's hotel and he had met Oliviero as if by chance, pretending he had come to Paris to sell certain paintings for a family of Roman patricians that happened to be in straits, never dreaming that Oliviero was in the French capital and in that hotel! But bustling about all day in connection with the famous paintings, he had finally wormed his way into the society of Oliviero and the latter's friends, and so intimately that he was in a position to describe the life and the habits of the three almost hour by hour. When not going to the races, Oliviero, Sabina, and Count Nallini usually rose about five o'clock in the afternoon. They rambled about town a bit; dined, next, in some fashionable restaurant with a great display of costly viands; and then, guided by Count Nallini, who seemed to be a cicerone expert in the vices and pleasures of the modern Babylon, caroused all night about theaters, night-resorts and gambling-dens, to end by greeting the sunrise, half drunk, in some restaurant. Count Nallini looked like an adventurer varnished over into a gentleman. Sabina was a vulgar, grasping woman. Oliviero was paying for

everything. He seemed to be well supplied with cash. He gambled a great deal, but without amusing himself at all. Apathetic and taciturn for the most part, he was being dragged by force into that labyrinth of corruption. He was always quarreling with Sabina. The woman seemed to be exasperated by his disdainful indifference, forever calling Oliviero a "crook" and potting him with other insults culled from the gutter. Oliviero did not bat an eyelash. He was deaf to such talk or pretended to be; but he treated her, at least in public, with undisguised rudeness.

Again restrained by Accolti from hurrying off to Paris, Donna Edvige began to besiege her husband with letters and telegrams: he must come back at once and devise some plan to rescue Oliviero from such company.

But the Marquis was not alarmed. Oliviero was sowing "a few wild oats": it was not a very pretty business, but it was not so dangerous either: it was to be expected of all young sons of rich fathers! When real danger appeared on the horizon, he would find a way to meet it! Nevertheless his wife's telegrams had their effect. He announced that he would abbreviate his election tour and return to Rome on the eighteenth.

Donna Edvige and Accolti were seeing each other daily to talk of Oliviero, exchange their thoughts and their anxieties, make and unmake plans. Accolti had concluded —hitting on the truth, but oversimplifying a little, as he usually did—that Oliviero was really suffering from a first violent disgust with the world and the evil in it; and he was almost inclined to believe that it would be a good thing to let the boy go to Africa. A task of responsibility and danger might ripen his character. The Marquis had been trying to keep his son too closely sheltered under parental supervision.

One day Donna Edvige hit on the idea of sending Oliviero around the world in Accolti's company.

"To help Oliviero," Accolti replied, "I would be ready to go to the moon! But I am beginning to wonder . . .

don't be alarmed! . . . I am beginning to wonder whether it would not be advisable to let him go to Africa."

"My husband would never consent."

"Why not? On account of the danger? I have thought of that. . . . Wars in Africa are skirmishes with savages, in which a white officer is killed every so often through an almost impossible accident. It might be a good thing for us to discuss the matter with the Marquis! I have been reading a small library of books on Abyssinia these days, and I am convinced that the reports sent from Paris to your husband are exaggerated. A hundred thousand men, to mention only the fighters, supporting themselves with their horses in a poor country like Abyssinia? Worse than a flight of locusts! No, I don't believe any such thing. Besides, the Abyssinians are one of the newest among the warlike peoples still left on this degenerate planet: they are masters at making war without fighting. That is the perfection of military art—not your going out in search of gory battles, which is the pride of European strategists! Do you remember the expedition of San Marzano? The same thing will happen next year. Abyssinia will move! She will march on our frontiers. She will threaten us—but just to obtain a compromise, without too much talking with gunpowder—a scarce article down there. . . . I don't say there's no danger—bullets do fly around and there are diseases. But after all, there's danger every time Oliviero goes out on his horse! . . ."

Between the eighth and the twelfth of June Castelnuovo wrote that Oliviero had lost considerable sums at gambling and that Nallini's false title concealed a professional card-sharp: this last information came from the French police, whom Castelnuovo had interested in the man's case through the Italian embassy. Nallini had probably enticed Oliviero to Paris with the intention of fleecing him, and he and Sabina were working in concert in that fine enterprise. A few days later, in confirmation of this disquieting conjecture, the vigilant Castelnuovo related that one morning, after a night of wild play, Oliviero had returned

to the hotel as naked as his bare fist; but thereupon a strange set-to had begun between the three. Oliviero had despatched a number of letters and telegrams and then shut himself up in his hotel, not to come forth again. Sabina and Count Nallini, on the other hand, continued their former existence, spending most of the night about town, amusing themselves, just as if Sabina's protector were Nallini, and not Oliviero. Every now and then they would lock themselves up in their apartment for conferences either with Oliviero alone, or with Oliviero and certain new and strange faces which Castelnuovo had not hitherto seen in their company.

On the seventeenth a long telegram from Castelnuovo explained the mystery of the secret conferences with strangers—Oliviero himself had told Castelnuovo. They were trying to persuade him to get cash by buying a necklace of pearls on credit from a jeweler who was a friend of Count Nallini. He could then pawn the necklace with another friend of the false count, a money-lender who, like the jeweler, was just dying to do Oliviero a friendly, disinterested service.

Castelnuovo had at once put Oliviero on guard: those people were trying to entangle him in an illegal situation. When he was fairly caught they would blackmail him by threatening to prosecute for swindling!

It was this news that faced the Marquis on his return to Rome on the eighteenth. He did not hesitate any longer: he saw that Oliviero must be snatched from such company. But how was it to be done? After circling and circling for more than a month around his own sorrow, as around a lake in the crater of a mountain, Alamanni had come back again after a long peregrination to that very relief on which he had turned his back immediately after the quarrel—forgiveness! His anger and his sorrow could find their vent only through that outlet. He must forgive, pay his son's debts, suggest to him the trip around the world with Accolti which Donna Edvige had proposed! Abruptly one day, without previous meditation, and without any

struggle with himself, he had adopted his wife's suggestion. Love in him had proved stronger than resentment! But also he had begun to hope again! What if Oliviero, remorseful and repentant, should suddenly come to his senses? The dynastic ambition was too strong in Alamanni for him to capitulate wholly and forever before a first disappointment!

But who would be ambassador to the enemy camp?

"I will go!" said Donna Edvige, firmly.

"You? To dicker with a woman of that caliber? And with a professional criminal like Count Nallini? It's a question of a liquidation—and a very intricate one to engineer! . . . Not even Accolti will do! He's too honest, too much of a gentleman—they'll take him in. . . . Give me twenty-four hours, and I'll find my man! . . ."

Donna Edvige was not, apparently, so set on her own proposal. She invited Accolti to luncheon, that he might expound his ideas on Africa to her husband, in case the trip around the world should prove inadequate to dislodge Oliviero from his position. After declaring himself ready to accompany Oliviero on the journey, Accolti remarked:

"You are right, Marquis, in trying out this idea! But let's consider the worse hypothesis for a moment. Suppose Oliviero does not give in, but persists in his first notion? . . . Donna Edvige has told me of your fears. But are they not just a bit exaggerated? Abyssinia cannot raise a hundred thousand rifles!"

"Yes, she can, yes, she can! . . . Menelik is, in his fashion, an Ethiopian Bismarck. He has succeeded in arming Abyssinia on the sly! Here they have never managed to get the point. A hundred thousand guns and a few million cartridges are nothing for us: for Abyssinia they are everything! They make a great power of the country, invulnerable in its mountains. . . ."

"In its mountains, yes! . . . Lord Napier would fail today—agreed! But I don't believe our Government is thinking of invading Abyssinia!"

"If it were, you know what I would say to Oliviero?

I would say, 'Go, by all means!' I can understand a Government that would decide to conquer Abyssinia after carefully making its plans and calculating just what is needed: so many men, so many guns, so many billions! Abyssinia is the Mexico of Africa. And I would also understand a Government which, convinced that the grapes were sour, would say, 'I retire to the coast and sail home again!' . . . That would be business! . . ."

"The trouble is," said Accolti, smiling, "this business is not business as you understand business, Marquis. These are affairs of State. The Government can neither conquer Abyssinia nor retire to the coast and sail home again. . . ."

"Because it is a Government of lawyers, professors, reporters, and politicians who know how to talk, write, and electioneer, but as for doing anything serious, anything great, anything useful to the country—no! . . ."

"And yet you have always been a Government man!" said Donna Edvige.

"Can I make people's heads over for them? Would you have me join hands with Rudinì, Zanardelli, Giolitti, or perhaps with Cavallotti and Andrea Costa? When this Government falls, they'll make a worse one! This one, at least, has a man—an old man to be sure, with queer ideas sometimes: he intends to conquer Abyssinia with the money of the Abyssinians! And no one listens to him. But, after all, he's a man—perhaps because, as Bonghi and Karl Mohr say, 'he's crazy, at least!'"

"Oliviero has been making converts!" said Accolti, turning to Donna Edvige with a smile. "The Marquis Alamanni has turned socialist too!"

"You socialists are a lot of rag Tommies," answered Alamanni, shrugging his shoulders. "If your heads were filled with brains instead of sawdust you would join forces with us, instead of fighting us. You stand for numbers, we for intelligence, initiative, capital. United, we would be boss and run things, getting rid of these lawyers!"

"That would make the world much simpler, wouldn't it—Capitalism and Socialism joining forces! . . ."

"Oh, I know—the world doesn't choose to be simpler. It prefers to be governed by hoodwinking and chatter. But you need not wonder if I for my part prefer not to have my son risking his life in business managed by these people. Oliviero is no fool! He cannot be altogether set on such an absurd notion. He was born for something better!"

When Alamanni returned home after office hours that day, he found the servants busy in the courtyard loading Donna Edvige's trunks into her carriage. He guessed at once, and hurried upstairs on the run:

"You are going to Paris!"

"Yes! We cannot lose another day on top of the many already lost!"

Donna Edvige's words were uttered so firmly that Alamanni realized it would be useless to protest. He thought a moment, then he said:

"Very well! . . . Very well! . . . But we understand, I hope! Oliviero leaves that gang, comes back to Rome, and puts Africa out of his head! Provided he yields on that point, I won't count the cost—I give you *carte blanche*. I warn you, however: there will be several questions involving money to settle with that woman . . . but don't you worry about that. I have given full instructions to X——" (and he named one of his secretaries). "He is leaving this evening too. You will make the journey together. Let him manage money matters: you attend to bringing Oliviero to his senses. But one thing: before you see Oliviero, have a talk with Castelnuovo and decide with him on the best way of getting at your prodigal son. . . . Oliviero is not alone, remember! If you broke in on him without warning, you might meet that woman. I should not care to have you do that. It would be a most unpleasant experience for you. There might even be some danger."

Donna Edvige arrived in Paris in company with her

husband's secretary on the morning of the twentieth and took rooms at the hotel where Oliviero was living. Castelnuovo had been apprised of her arrival and was on hand to report that finally Oliviero had dropped a number of personal confidences. He was sick of Sabina, of Count Nallini, of the life he was leading. One day or another he would make an end of it by shooting himself! Castelnuovo was not to ask him why he did not leave Paris and go back to Rome: he couldn't, he couldn't, he couldn't! And he would explain no further!

Worried at such news, Donna Edvige did not hesitate a moment longer. Disregarding Castelnuovo's cautioning allusions to the person with whom Oliviero was living, she went straight to her son's apartment, and quite as if she were in Rome in her own palace she opened his door without sending in her name and appeared in the little parlor where Oliviero sat reading a newspaper, in the same mood of bitter gloom which had not once left him since his departure from Rome.

What a horror those three frightful days in Venice had been for him with Elena so near and yet invisible! There she was, a few yards away from him! But he could not see her! He could not even hope to win her back! And the tantalizing torment filled him with such atrocious pain, such hatred of everything and everybody, that he would have liked to pitch Sabina into the Grand Canal. After sprinkling their contraband honeymoon for three days with the orange blossoms of unprovoked vituperation, he made no objection when the false Count Nallini, an old acquaintance of Sabina's, suggested that the three of them take a trip to Paris.

In Paris the frantic despair of Venice turned into that prostration of will which in young men is always the direct consequence of disappointment in love: and in that prostration the two slave-drivers whom he had hired to goad him, dragged him about in their trail for more than a month. He was not having a good time. He could not have been more desperate. But in that state of mental impo-

tence, he was unable to break the chain and grew steadily worse each day, trying to stupefy himself in wine, in voluptuousness, in gambling. A real passion for games of chance had laid hold on him. The only hours of the day or night in which he felt a little free from pain, were those in which he was pitting his strength against Fortune in the capricious combinations produced by a wheel or a pack of cards. But of this sodden, perverse, half-animal life, he felt an utter loathing, and that loathing he vented on Sabina, hating her as though she were some weird and monstrous instrument of artificial pleasure. But then he would feel ashamed of the rude and boorish scenes to which he treated her, and try to make up for them with lavish gifts, especially at the moments when his search for stupor brought him to depend on her goodwill. A bit of soul clings to all the operations of love, even to those that are most exclusively physical; and Sabina, in practicing her profession, had had a certain crude experience of men. She guessed at once that Oliviero was in love with another woman who had either refused him or ceased requiting him; and that he had resorted to this affair with her in order to get revenge. Not very flattered at the rôle assigned her in the tragi-comedy, she would now resent it and pay him back in his own coin, and now play victim, pretending to despair and to weep, enduring the indignities to which her lover subjected her with an eye to the hundred thousand he had promised at the end, and to the gifts with which he paid for his bad manners from day to day.

In his horror for the filth in which he was wallowing, Oliviero could no longer allow himself to think of his mother, of Susanna, of Marietta, of Accolti. But of his father he thought often, and deliberately, and far from with shame, with a certain cold resentment. His horror at his own insolence, which had been so strong just after the quarrel as to drive him from Rome, had lessened with time and distance. Now it had vanished altogether! Remorse for his flight, yes; for the dissipation in which he

was now living, yes; and for the sorrow he was causing his mother, Accolti, perhaps even Susanna! But not for what he had said to his father, nor for any pain his escapades might be causing that man! The more, and the more maturely, he thought of their stormy altercation, the dimmer his father's reproaches, in themselves, became: what offended him was something else—the harshness with which the Marquis kept bringing his filial subjection home to him! That attitude tallied with so many things his father had said and done—always the oppressor determined to impose his will, his opinions, his ways of seeing and feeling things. Long before, had his mother not intervened, he would have even prevented him from going to military school at Modena! And now, in those last months, those talks on the two truths and on benevolent traitors, his change of front after the decision in the Cavalieri case, his exhortation on secret powers—worst of all his bitter reproaches for the gift to Marietta! How disgusting! Yes, he had given Marietta four thousand lire! He would give them over again! He would give her ten times as much, if he were doing it again! To people who deserved help, he would give what he chose without asking permission of any one—much less of his father! And the more acutely these cruel thoughts rasped within him, the greater his right to revolt seemed to grow, whether revolt through dissoluteness, or revolt by going to get killed in Africa! He was no longer a child: he had the right to think and to decide for himself! Let his father surrender on Africa, and he would abandon Paris and the somber prison of odious voluptuousness in which he felt confined!

"You? Here?" he cried, half terrified, leaping to his feet at sight of his mother.

"Yes—me!" answered Donna Edvige, walking resolutely toward him and embracing him.

But Oliviero scarcely waited to receive her kiss. He seized her excitedly by the hand as though to drag her away:

"Come, mamma, come! You can't stay here! This is no

place for you. Which hotel are you stopping at? Let's go there! Let's go there!"

"Because I might meet Sabina?" asked his mother quietly. Like Accolti, like her husband, like Castelnuovo, Oliviero too was afraid she might encounter the woman!

"Oh, so you know! They told you I was not alone here?"

"I have known it for some time! I have come on purpose to take you away from her. I would have come before, had they all not been afraid I might meet her! . . ."

"Mamma . . ." Oliviero began.

But the discussion was cut short. Sabina had been pottering about in the adjacent bedroom. Her suspicions aroused by the woman's voice she heard in the sitting-room, she had stood listening at the door, unable to catch the drift of the conversation, but recognizing the language as Italian. At mention of her name, she made bold to enter, doubly curious to see who the Italian woman was, and why they were talking about her. As happened to everybody at first glance, Donna Edvige seemed to her not only beautiful and well gowned, but also much younger than her years. Sabina stopped short, in shocked surprise: then she said, in sarcastic reprisal:

"Oh, delighted—my congratulations! . . . You're in excellent company! . . . Don't let me interrupt! . . . If I'm in the way . . ."

"It's my mother, you fool!" answered Oliviero, angrily.

Now Sabina was really embarrassed:

"Oh, Signora, I didn't dream . . . You, his mother? Oh, excuse me, Signora! I was just going . . ."

Sabina had learned from friends that Oliviero's mother was a strait-laced creature, one of the kind that at the mere thought of her boy's being in her company would rush to church to tell no end of rosaries. On finding Donna Edvige suddenly confronting her face to face, Sabina had a first flash of sincere shame. Her excuse that she "was just going" had none of the insolent malice of her first words. It implied an admission that the mother

with whom she was speaking had a right to refuse an introduction to a woman of her class.

The cold silence that greeted the intention she had manifested might have hinted to her that in putting it into effect she would be doing both mother and son a very great favor. But Sabina did not go. Instead, finding herself beside a little sofa, she let herself down, rather timidly, upon it, sitting on the very edge, as if to suggest that she was really not staying, that she scarcely felt at home.

There was a moment's silence. No one of the three knew what to say. Donna Edvige now understood that when her husband, Accolti, Castelnuovo, her son, felt worried over such an encounter, they were thinking of the very situation in which she found herself.

But to issue from the dilemma without discourtesy she turned to Oliviero and said, extemporizing out-of-hand:

"I have several matters of business to attend to this morning, and I shall need you. I have promised to take you to luncheon with the Princess X——. Go and get dressed and be as quick as you can! I shall wait for you here!"

But the moment Oliviero left the room Sabina broke silence, speaking in a subdued, modest, almost humble tone:

"You have come to get your son? I understand!" She paused, sighed, and then continued: "A mother cannot be happy to know her son is leading a wild life. But believe me, Signora, if we have seemed very foolish, I really am not responsible. I scarcely knew your son. I met him two or three times, at dinner, in company with friends. One morning he comes to me and asks me if I am willing to take a trip around Europe with him—but we have to leave at once, that very evening, for Venice. . . ."

"How do you explain such a notion on his part?" asked Donna Edvige, unable to resist a temptation to seek light on her son's behavior despite her reluctance to talk with the woman.

The girl lowered her eyes, and smiled in a sort of modest complacency:

"Love, Signora, just love! It often comes that way—like a bomb bursting. The French call it the *coup de foudre. Coups de foudre* are a specialty of mine, it would seem. But that morning you should have seen him, poor lamb. You could read it in his eyes: if I had said no, he would have done something desperate! . . . So I couldn't resist. . . . When a girl has a heart . . . Excuse me for saying so—but I've made some sacrifices. I had a friend, who liked me, and he was giving me everything I wanted. . . ."

Donna Edvige had hoped for something that would solve the mystery of Oliviero's double insistence on Africa and on flight from home. Her face fell at these unsolicited confidences. She made no comment as the girl halted.

But Sabina must have had reasons of her own for talking; because, after a brief silence, she resumed on her own initiative and account:

"He had to go to Venice at all costs, and right away! I don't know why. To please him, I consented, though I was not altogether convinced! But Venice was too gloomy for him. I realized that, at once, and I brought him here to Paris, where he has been having a good time. He has got over the blues he had when we started out. At least, if we have to separate now, I'm glad he'll not have bad memories of me."

She sat silent a moment, sighed again, and then continued:

"Excuse me if I am a little upset. I did not expect it, so soon. Oh, I know—people don't believe it—but we girls have feelings and we get fond of men. They want only pleasure from us; but we, poor women, if it weren't for some illusion . . ."

Tears were sparkling in the eyes of the beautiful mercenary. But Donna Edvige was a little bewildered by so many lies, unable to discern the loose end in them. Was Sabina thinking of advancing claims on Oliviero's heart? That pure soul who sat incombustible among the fires of all worldly passions could never have guessed the ruin

which her son's imprudent generosities had wrought in that vulgar and calculating woman. She could not have suspected that five zeros captained by unity were making that woman rave, as they had made a certain lawyer rave one evening after a certain conversation in a certain carriage between him and a Senator of the Realm; just as, in those days, they would have set to raving any brain among the many, many brains less cold than hers to the good things of this world! Sabina had begun to worry when her lover's treasury ran dry. She was positively frightened now at having suddenly to deal with his mother. The latter had come—as she quickly guessed—not only to take her son away, but also to save a penny or two on that hundred thousand! Oh, she knew, she knew from experience! There's nobody so stingy as your rich people! What a fuss those rancid millionaires would make over the few lire Oliviero had spent on her! That was why Sabina had played the sentimental card, as a woman in love and sacrificing herself for love. She hoped thereby to get a bit of endorsement on the back of Oliviero's verbal promise!

Luckily Oliviero returned just then ready to go out.

The two started along the Rue Castiglione toward the Place Vendôme. But hardly in the street the mother took her son by the arm, and drawing him close to her side began with caressing heartsickness:

"Oliviero, when we are together . . . if you are sad, I am; if you are happy, I am. But when you are far away, you always seem sad to me, very, very sad. . . ."

Her words brought home to Oliviero in a flash all the agony he had caused her through that wretched flight from Rome. To avoid an answer too difficult for him in his shame he asked:

"What did that woman say to you?"

"She said that you descended on her one morning like a thunderbolt, and asked her if she would go away with you that evening. Did you?"

"Yes!"

"The day of the quarrel? But how did you get that strange idea?"

Oliviero did not answer, but walked on in silence, turning to the left across the Place Vendôme. His mother drew his arm tightly to her again:

"When you were little, and I would be spoiling you, and everybody would be blaming me for it, I used to answer, 'This time it was for my own pleasure—and I am enjoying it!' You were such a gay little boy! And I thought God had made you that way as a compensation to me—I was so unhappy then! . . . But now, instead, it is you who are unhappy. . . ."

Oliviero could not listen to such talk. It hurt him too much. To halt it, he stopped at the corner of the Rue de la Paix and asked:

"You know the kind of life I have been leading here these past weeks?"

"Yes!"

"And you have come to take me home?"

"I have come to give you back a little of the joy you gave me when I was unhappy. I hope I shall succeed. . . ."

Oliviero relapsed into his despondent, half-weary silence.

They strolled for a time about the great crowded streets in the center of Paris, gradually making their way toward a restaurant near the Madeleine. Donna Edvige had decided to have luncheon there in a private room where they could talk freely.

She began with news of Accolti, of Susanna, of Marietta's release from prison. But she noticed at once that Oliviero was following her remarks with a sort of affectionate passivity, answering with the few concise replies that were called for, but doing nothing to bring matters to the point. She had to depend entirely on herself to reach the subject of greatest importance—his father. Slipping casually from theme to theme, she at last mentioned the Marquis. He had been in a bad humor for some days after the quarrel. He was very angry that Oliviero had run away and with a woman. But in the end he had understood

—the tongue, more than the spirit, was at fault, and the flight from Rome was an act of desperation! Now he had forgiven! His one desire was that Oliviero should return, and at once, that day or the next! If Oliviero really wanted to absent himself from Rome for a while, the father offered him a tour around the world with Accolti!

If Oliviero had said little at the beginning, during this talk about his father he said nothing at all. Finally when his mother had finished, he thought for a time and then said, abruptly:

"But I can't leave, either today or tomorrow; and I don't know when I shall be able to. I have made some promises to that woman."

"I know, I know! But we have thought of that! Your father sent a man with me to adjust those matters. By the time we get back to the hotel, Sabina will have received what is owing her."

"You and father also know that I promised . . ."

"Your father always knows everything. . . ."

The remark disconcerted Oliviero. He fell silent again. Then he changed the subject, but not his tone:

"Traveling even for study, and especially with Accolti, is always amusing. But I don't need amusement. Amusing myself is all I know how to do. . . . Well, I am tired of it! You and father think me ridiculous, I know. . . ."

"No, no, Oliviero! We know that you are unhappy. We want to help you!"

"You think me an unbalanced wastrel, and you are right. And Accolti too—who knows what he thinks of me! . . ."

"Accolti wanted to come here in my place, to tell you what I am telling you. But his work kept him in Rome. So you don't like the idea of traveling? Well, if you prefer to stay in Rome and go to work in your father's offices, he would ask nothing better. In taking care of such big properties a boy may make a man of himself!"

Oliviero shook his head:

"I'm afraid that big business is not my line, at least not for the present. . . ."

He hesitated a moment, then he said resolutely:

"Mamma, I have got to go to Africa! . . ."

The mother trembled:

"But, Oliviero, that's impossible!"

"Then it's impossible for me to allow you to pay for my follies. To have left Rome the way I did, and then a month and a half later to have to turn to my father's cashbox to pay a woman of that kind . . . that would be too great a humiliation! If I could make up for it, expiate it in some way, by going to Africa, I would be resigned. But if not, no! I would be confessing that when I said I wanted to go to Africa, I was pretending. . . ."

"But no one thinks that! Just consider, Oliviero! If your father doesn't pay . . ."

"I will!"

"You?"

"Yes—I! I have some resources—I can borrow. I'll sell the jewelry I own, and the horses you gave me. I'll find a way!"

Oliviero had succeeded in his first purpose self-avowed: he had frightened his father, forced him to forgive, procured his own liberation from that hateful prison-house of pleasure. He might have been content. . . . Instead he felt hurt, irritated, by all that kindness, all that forgiveness, all that generosity. To be on the threshold of such freedom irked him as much as the prison-house itself, and perhaps more. At certain times, on certain occasions, people feel a hunger and a thirst for suffering—this the religions well know. Oliviero had just such a hunger and thirst. In freeing him from the consequences of his madness his father was humiliating him again! He felt weaker, more selfish, more useless, than ever, just when he most yearned to be a man, free from any yoke of paternal tyranny, or of personal dissipation. No forgiveness, no kindness, no material gift could alleviate the anguish in that soul, which was still unable to subordinate selfish

instincts to noble passions, but was nevertheless beyond satisfaction from pleasures or riches. Indeed, offers of such satisfactions, especially from the father but also from the mother, accentuated the pain they meant to heal precisely because they were impotent to heal it. That was why Oliviero's despair, which could not vent itself in fury upon the mother, turned into that hunger and thirst for suffering, expiation, death; for if in part it was really a demand for expiation, it was also in part a first beginning of that disordered turmoil of resolve that pushes many unhappy people to suicide.

As it turned out, Donna Edvige's hopes that the affair with Sabina would be liquidated before evening were disappointed. Sabina took a lofty attitude in the matter, that of a great lady who set her own amusements on a plane far above vile questions of money. She sent word to the secretary of the Marquis Alamanni that she could not see him that afternoon because she had to go to the races with Count Nallini. She would see him after dinner, that evening.

Nothing came of the conference except a violent squabble, as mother and son learned on returning from the theater. The Marquis Alamanni had charged his subordinate to heal the wounds in Sabina's tender heart with a plaster of thousand-lire bills, but in no case of more, and if possible, of less, than thirty of them. Sabina disdainfully rejected the compromise.

"A hundred thousand? You promised her a hundred thousand?" gasped Donna Edvige. Even in her eyes, especially in her eyes, such prodigality on her son's part seemed an affront to reason and decency.

"I thought you knew!" said Oliviero, lowering his eyes, his face red with shame.

But the secretary was in a quandary and wanted to know what he should do: telegraph for new instructions from Rome, or adhere rigidly to those received?

"Don't worry!" said Donna Edvige. "I will iron out the difficulty tomorrow!"

When they were left alone, Oliviero raised his eyes, and cried to his mother excitedly:

"Don't you see? I have to pay this debt! That father should not care to spend his money, just because I am a man of no principles, I well understand. But if he can haggle—I can't. A man doesn't bargain for a woman's favors after he has accepted them! This whole business is a disgrace to me!"

"Don't worry, Oliviero! Leave everything to me!"

"What can you do about it?"

"Leave it all to me, I say! You think, instead, of some way to satisfy your father! Go and get some sleep now . . . and may the night bring you counsel!"

And the long night, thorned with painful reflections for both of them, brought them both counsel.

Donna Edvige not only preached justice to others. She practiced it with every one. She conceded her husband's right to bargain with Sabina over such a princely wage of sin: but she also understood the shame and humiliation such haggling would involve for Oliviero. She thought, therefore, at once of bringing father and son into accord by falling back on what she was wont to call her "war treasure," money of her own from her dowry, which her husband had returned to her as a gift on their wedding day, from her jewels, from her personal inheritances, from other gifts. Though seventy thousand lire would make a great hole in that treasure, and she felt a pain in her heart as she thought of the woman who was to receive so much money and why, this solution of the difficulty through a sacrifice of her own seemed to her so simple and so just that she never stopped to consider whether by interfering in such a liquidation she were not committing a grave imprudence, and whether her husband were not right in preferring to leave such business to others.

And the next morning, at breakfast, Oliviero expounded to his mother the counsel that the night had brought to him. He had found a way to solve all his difficulties! His father would lend him the money to pay Sabina and

other little debts incurred during that month and a half. They were not many and not large—he had left Rome with a lot of money won previously at gambling. Now for some weeks, as the thought of his promises to Sabina began to annoy him, he had been thinking of ways of earning money. He remembered a captain in his regiment who had emigrated to the United States the year before and opened a riding-school in Chicago. . . . Since he could not go to Africa, the road to America at least was free of veto. He would go to Chicago and open a riding-school himself—his father would advance the capital for that too! In that way little by little he would pay off his debts!

As in the last weeks of his love for Elena, America had reappeared as a substitute for Africa, in the ravings of that youth in revolt! On this new extravagance, Donna Edvige frowned:

"What ideas you do get! I still understand Africa! Down there, at least, there is a national interest. One may question whether the interest is worth the personal sacrifice: but no one can find any fault if the young Marquis Alamanni chooses to risk his life to defend Italian territories in the tropics. But emigrating to America, like a bankrupt; to become—" She was silent a moment. "I hope you're not thinking of becoming a jockey!"

"That at least would be an honest trade!" the boy was still cruel enough to reply.

"But, Oliviero, Oliviero!" pleaded the mother. "Can you imagine that your father needs to have you pay him back penny for penny? You will be contracting a debt toward him today, I know, but a debt of gratitude to be paid in affection and wise conduct."

Oliviero was crushed by her aggrieved tone:

"But I can't and I won't!" he cried. "I can't go back to my old life in Rome. I have deserved a punishment. . . ."

"And deserving punishment, you inflict it on your parents, on Accolti, on Susanna, on everybody who is

fond of you? To repair one wrong must you do another?"

But at that moment a servant entered. Sabina desired to speak with the Signora Marchesa!

Oliviero made a gesture of impatience.

"What nerve! . . . Don't receive her, mamma!" he cried.

"If she has something to say to me, why shouldn't I hear it?" replied Donna Edvige tranquilly. "Besides I have something to say to her, perhaps on the same subject!" And she motioned to the servant to admit the visitor.

Sabina's worries had been relieved somewhat when she learned that a secretary of Marquis Alamanni had accompanied the Marchesa "to liquidate all pendencies." But her distrust had exploded anew and with almost savage fury during the bickering with the secretary. In offering such an enormous sum of money with such insulting directness, Oliviero had unchained in that coarse spirit, spoiled first by poverty and then by an ease of doubtful alloy, the evil passions born both of poverty and wealth! Sabina ran straightway to unbosom herself to the false count. Those millionaires were the usual stingy lot! They were trying to rob her of seventy thousand lire, earned by hard honest work! And to manage it, they had sent that mother with the little face of a painted Madonna to do the bloodletting. But they were guessing wrong! They would soon find out just whom they were dealing with! She had swallowed too many insults in that month and a half!

So the first thing in the morning, she resolved to see the Marchesa, determined to defend her rights with all that insolent aggressiveness, half deliberate, half instinctive, with which the *popolano* assails the gentleman when—and that is the worst combination—when he thinks he holds the whip-hand, but at the same time is afraid of being browbeaten.

"Well, Signora Marchesa" (she had patched up her

heraldry since the preceding interview), "I am hearing a lot of talk, but I see very little coin!"

And she sat down.

But that morning Oliviero was not in the mood for trifling. He took umbrage at once.

"One moment there—notice whom you are talking to, and watch your tone of voice!"

Sabina whirled impetuously upon him and they might have come to blows then and there had not Donna Edvige intervened:

"Just what have you in mind? The proposition my husband's secretary made to you yesterday?"

"Just so! Thirty thousand lire he had the courage to offer me! What does he take me for? One of those women that walk the streets at night? Your son promised me a hundred thousand! Did you, or didn't you? He needn't try to deny it, just because I didn't make him sign a contract before a notary! . . ."

"Don't be alarmed! You shall have exactly what was promised you. Such part of it as my husband refused to give you, I will make up myself!"

"You, mamma?" cried Oliviero, surprised, and refusing.

His mother hushed him with a wave of her hand.

"We are leaving for Rome this evening. Before we go, my husband's secretary will pay you the amount he offered. The moment I reach home I will send you the remainder—here in Paris, or wherever you choose!"

There was a moment of silence. Donna Edvige sat looking calmly at Sabina. Oliviero was staring at the ceiling, as though trying to absent himself from a dialogue so lamentable for him. Sabina looked anxiously back and forth, now at the mother, now at the son. She didn't trust them, she didn't! And she saw significances and dark corners everywhere. Why had Oliviero tried to stop his mother just as she was promising to pay? Why had the mother bade him be silent with that wave of the hand? Why was Oliviero staring at the ceiling as though deaf, dumb, and blind? Why was the mother putting off, in-

stead of producing the cash on the spot as her husband was doing? Sabina felt herself floundering in a net of lies; and she was going to show those big fellows, for all they felt so smart, that it wouldn't be an easy thing to pull the wool over her eyes!

"The bargain was that at the end of the trip I would get a hundred thousand! If you are leaving tonight, the trip ends now!"

But Oliviero was losing his temper again before that undisguised, almost flaunted, distrust:

"What you say is outrageous, Sabina!" he said. "My mother will send you what she has promised at her convenience: and you will be more than honored to receive it from her hands. . . ."

But Oliviero's incautious and contemptuous impatience, instead of intimidating Sabina, irritated her still more. She was now sure she was being played. She answered quickly and this time with aggressive outspokenness:

"I am only asking for what is due me. What I want to know is whether you are going to pay, or whether you are trying to cheat me!"

"Be careful how you speak!" shouted Oliveiro, leaping to his feet. "Don't force me to remind you of just what you are!"

"Oliviero! Oliviero!" implored the mother.

But Sabina looked him defiantly in the face, certain that he was trying to pay her with insults instead of lire:

"So you think you can frighten me! Instead of keeping your word you fling my profession in my face? Well, yes, I do sell myself, but I am not the only one who does it, nor the worst. At least I have the courage to be honest about it. There are countesses and marquises I could mention who, in their time, had barely the shirts on their backs, and now sport their horses and carriages! And why? Because they managed to get themselves married to some fat millionaire old enough to be their father. . . . They sold themselves! I sell myself! . . ."

The wretched mercenary had made this allusion to

Donna Edvige's marriage with Alamanni on the spur of the moment, in the malignant exasperation of her rage. But a resounding slap on her face cut the vile insult short.

"Coward! Coward!" she screamed infuriated, driving a balled fist into Oliviero's right eye.

But he had his hands about her throat and neck and was choking her:

"I'll strangle you, dog of a woman!"

But two hands he would never have suspected of such strength loosened his grasp and pulled him back, while a frightened voice called, pleading:

"Oliviero! Oliviero! What are you doing?"

And the same voice, to Sabina:

"Go! I will find a way to pay you before evening!"

"So you see how to treat your stingy millionaires, when they choke and refuse to cough up—four or five well-chosen words in the right tone of voice. . . ."

So Sabina concluded triumphantly to the false count later that afternoon. For a little worldly Providence able to extricate Donna Edvige from that dilemma happened fortunately to be in Paris just then. Within two hours Castelnuovo was back at the hotel with the seventy thousand lire. He had borrowed them from a wealthy art-dealer who had provided the Alamanni villa at San Remo with a collection of Nattiers.

Mother and son were able to leave for Rome that evening, turning their backs forever on that past. Neither of the two, meantime, had adverted to the subject of their talk on the day preceding. Donna Edvige for her part was too much engrossed with the shock of the scene with Sabina, and Oliviero with his humiliation at having exposed his mother to such an experience through fault of his. They boarded their train as if in agreement about everything, though both really had yielded ground: Donna Edvige had not obtained from her son the renunciation of his African plan demanded by the father as a condition of forgiveness: Oliviero had not obtained consent for his

departure and therefore had tacitly accepted his father's terms. Both of them felt pledged reciprocally and in an inverse sense.

As the train rolled noisily southward in the dark of the night Oliviero lay on his couch in their compartment looking at his mother through half-closed eyes. She lay on the couch opposite and seemed to be asleep. And he kept thinking, thinking. . . .

He had given Marietta that little sum of money and what had happened had happened. And he had promised Sabina that huge sum of money and what had happened had happened. . . . Was money, then, the curse? Or was it his hands that brought the curse whenever they handled money? Whether for reasons good or for reasons bad they always did harm! Going deeper into this thought, his soul darkened with a despondent fear lest he were a creature marked by fate, damned to evil forever; and in the throes of an intolerable despair, he turned over, rested his forehead on his bent arm and, believing his mother asleep, gave vent to all his misery in a sob.

But suddenly he felt caressing fingers stroking his hair, and the softest voice he had ever heard murmuring in his ear:

"What is the matter, my child? Tell your mother! She has come to give you back the happiness you gave her when she was sad! . . ."

Oliviero turned, raised himself halfway on his elbow, and seized his mother's hand, as she knelt at his side:

"Mamma, listen! You are the only one who can understand. The others, I know, all think I am mad. In agreeing to leave this evening, after all that had happened, I agreed to go back to Rome. If you insist—well, I have agreed: I will go back. But I must go to Africa: I must! I must! . . . I am a wicked and despicable creature, mamma." And he repeated, at his mother's gesture of protest: "Yes, wicked and despicable. There's an ugly demon in me: licentious, lazy, cruel, violent. . . . I am afraid of myself: I can feel that vice, idleness, dissipation, selfishness,

are making a final attack on me. I feel that if I go back to Rome they will get me in a few months! Save me, mamma—you are the only one who can! I need to subject myself to some kind of discipline, to face a test, to know what poverty is, perhaps. Oh, I know—when you say that to papa, he will answer that I am crazy! But this is the way it is: if I complain of an injustice that has been done to me, they answer: 'Why do you kick—you are rich?' If I resent a wicked act some one is doing, they answer: 'If you were as poor as he you would do what he did and even worse!' If I try to work, make myself useful, do something worth while, they answer: 'Enjoy your horses, your women, your millions, and let the rest of us alone!' And then . . . every time I use my wealth, I make a mistake—things go wrong! I give four thousand lire to reward a loyal act and Marietta goes to prison. I pay wages to vice and the result is—what happened this morning! Oh, mamma, as long as I live, the memory of this morning will be a weight on my conscience! But is it my fault if papa is so rich? I am tired of having my wealth thrown in my face. I am tired of using it so badly. I want to live as other people live, experience the trials of life, not be 'papa's boy' any longer. I'll make mistakes! I'll suffer! I'll hurt myself! But that doesn't matter. Isn't that the law of life? Why should I alone be a minor as long as my father lives? Now if you really insist on my returning to Rome—I have promised, I'll go with you: but in Rome, I repeat, I won't find the strength to strangle the ugly demon that is getting the better of me! Suppose I get off at Chambéry! I'll put up at a little hotel there and wait for an answer. You talk to papa and persuade him. Make him let me go to Africa! It will be a mistake, but I have to make it: I have vowed it. I know I am giving you and father a great sorrow; but if you love me, you will find strength to make this last sacrifice for me, the way you have made so many others! It is the last one I ask, but it is the most necessary. Don't refuse it, unless you would have me die of shame for what I

have done! I need to rehabilitate myself in my own eyes, prove to myself that I am capable of mastering myself, capable of suffering, of renouncing something. Do you know? I am afraid of Africa myself! But on that very account I want to go there. I want to prove to myself that I am not a coward. Unless I prove it and at once, I'll be a coward all the rest of my life. I'll be good for nothing except to live a life of dissipation with women like Sabina! I say again: I need discipline, I need a rest! You understand me, don't you, mamma? Make papa understand too! Only you can! Will you? You promise me that?"

"Yes, darling, I promise!"

CHAPTER XVI

Oliviero took leave of his mother at Chambéry, and Donna Edvige arrived in Rome the following morning, the twenty-third of June, alone.

The doubts and hypotheses on which she had lingered during the weeks preceding had now become certainty. She understood.

She had been aware for some time that Alamanni loved his son, as he had loved her, with a love passionate but transposed—in his son, as in her, he loved himself. That was why he felt called upon to assure for Oliviero, as he had for her, many good things of this world which mattered little to Oliviero as they had mattered never at all to her. But Oliviero had not been aware of this tyranny in the past and had endured it submissively. She had hoped, accordingly, that the break might be made gradually, without either tyrant or slave becoming aware of it. But instead, the son had suddenly perceived his chain, and was determined to snap it in one violent jerk. Oliviero's romantic and desperate affection for Susanna, his resent-

ment at the injustices he had endured, his youthful disgust at the first revelation of evil in the world—those things had been there too: but the fundamental, the strongest, impellent toward Africa was the boy's revolt against his father. Oliviero wanted to go to Africa because his father did not want him to go: his will had risen against the will he felt as tyrannizing over him. A soul in the making, an adolescent pride, were pitted against that blind paternal love, and they had been only exasperated by the father's last act of forgiveness. Her husband had footed the bill of Oliviero's folly to force the boy to abandon Africa. Compelled by circumstances to accept that succor, Oliviero was all the more determined to go, in his very severity with himself as a confessed and repentant culprit vowing expiation.

She understood! She understood! One thing still she did not understand. Just as she had never succeeded in explaining to herself the sudden maturing of Oliviero's African plan the day after the banquet, so she sensed in his present violence of self-accusation a hidden demon that was exacerbating the boy's sentiments of filial revolt with its own roily frenzies. And she was worried. She knew that when Love, omnipotent Love, which no human being can resist altogether, lays hold on the heart of one of those unhappy men who, like her husband, do not know how to love, it condemns them often to do more harm by loving than they would have done by hating. What if that blind love of the father's failed to understand the boy's revolt, were, in fact, hurt by it, provoked into becoming more tyrannical by Oliviero's resolve to seek a liberty so dangerous? She would explain her son's case to her husband. But what would happen, what would she do, if father and son should cling stubbornly each to his own position? She asked herself that question a hundred times on her long ride alone from Savoy to Rome. But she found no answer to the puzzle. The motives impelling the boy were so real and so deep that she would support him as best she could; but time and again, had she plumbed

the depths of her conscience, she would have discovered a secret hope that her husband would stand impregnably firm. She too was afraid of Africa! And suppose her husband were as right about Africa as he had been in his dread of her meeting Sabina? Honest in mind as she was upright of heart, she saw that her husband had been wiser on that point than she. By intervening in person between her son and Sabina she had provoked the final quarrel, and that had irrevocably precipitated Oliviero's decision. . . . Up to that moment there had still been hope!

Her husband was naturally surprised at seeing her arrive alone. She related the story of her mission briefly, expurgating it of everything that might have offended him. She said, keeping to generalities, that after many talks and hesitations, Oliviero had consented to return and even to give up Africa; but on condition that his father give a final hearing to his case which he had intrusted in full confidence to her.

"I thought I had spoken plainly enough!" said Alamanni sharply. "What more has he got to say?"

Donna Edvige tried to explain Oliviero's state of mind.

Alamanni shook his head in bitter helplessness.

"Pained at the evil in the world! Desperate at having wasted so much time and money with that drab! Ashamed of having had to call on my purse! . . . For one thing only he has no shame—for the things he said to his father! . . ."

"No, no, no!" fluttered Donna Edvige. "He is sorry for that, he is sorry! You will see, when you talk to him. . . ."

But Alamanni interrupted. In the clairvoyancy of his disappointed grief he had reached the truth through her attenuations and softenings.

"Never mind! Never mind! The important thing is that he persists in his plan for Africa. And do you want to know why? I haven't told you sooner, because I dislike gossip. But here Oliviero has been telling you all sorts of

fine things and you have been taking them seriously. I will give you the secret, counting on your discretion. Injustices in the world? Desire to expiate? Nonsense! Oliviero wants to go to Africa because his mistress has thrown him over. And, not to mention names, the fickle mistress is the Countess Asterio. . . ."

"No!" cried Donna Edvige, yielding to a first impulse of astonished incredulity.

"You say no!" replied Alamanni. "Listen, then. . . ."

And he gave her, one by one in a cumulative series, all his arguments of proof. At each new argument Donna Edvige would recall particulars that had escaped from her memory. She too came to feel that she had found at last a very simple explanation of a truth she had known intuitively and in which the unknown demon stood suddenly revealed.

She was too overcome to speak when her husband had finished. Indeed, she would not have known what to say. Her husband sat studying her for a time in silence, then he continued on his own account:

"Speaking of Africa, what do you think of the latest news? Baratieri is beginning to open his eyes. Better late than never, you'll probably say. But guess the remedy he has found! A nice letter of resignation, in which he says some one else may be able to do what he cannot do: defend the colony without soldiers! In plain language, he is trying to squirm out! And do you think the Government is snatching this opportunity to send in a real general with the necessary equipment? Not at all—molasses! Telegrams and letters to humor him! They are telling him he's the man to conquer Abyssinia even without soldiers! Why, at the Consulta and at Palazzo Braschi they are planning to bring him on to Italy this summer and exhibit him from city to city like a crocodile or a hippopotamus! That's the way we are ruled! Would you care to sacrifice your son to the vanity of an ink-spilling general, the avarice of a Levantine Jew, the ambition of a sometime conspirator?"

If Alamanni was exaggerating the mistakes of Power because they momentarily justified some of his pet aversions, Donna Edvige, for a contrary reason, did not like to believe they were quite so serious:

"But can they possibly be treating matters of such moment so lightly? You yourself have always praised this Government. . . ."

Alamanni shrugged his shoulders:

"Suppose tomorrow the King were to do what that Roman Emperor wanted to do—put a horse at the head of the Government? Wouldn't I be obliged to shout that there wasn't one Italian more intelligent than that quadruped? Power holds so many of my interests in hand . . ."

But seeing that Donna Edvige had been properly alarmed, he forced his point:

"For that matter, even if we were governed by a Solomon, I wouldn't change my mind. Do you think that wars down there are fought the way they are in Europe—with gloves? The Abyssinians are wild beasts—just the opposite of what Count Accolti says: they fight not for a policy but to kill as many people as they can; they finish off the wounded; they mutilate and rob the dead! Suppose Oliviero were to be made prisoner? Can you imagine him—a son of ours, pulling a plow in the fields under the lash of some *ras?* Don't delude yourself into thinking there are Red Crosses, hospitals, doctors, nurses in Africa! Suppose he should be wounded? Suppose he fell sick of typhoid, or smallpox, or the plague? These barbarian hordes are wandering pest-houses. Bullets don't worry me so much as the four rags the Abyssinians wear on their backs and the filth they leave along their trail."

Still shaken by the revelation as to the Countess Asterio, Donna Edvige winced under these cruel thrusts, but she remembered she had a son waiting for his message of liberation at Chambéry. She tried a forlorn hope:

"I know, I know: Africa is full of dangers. But you have not talked with Oliviero. You have no conception of his state of mind. Must I tell you? I should have preferred

to spare you such particulars. . . . He even told me that, if he doesn't go to Africa, he'll go to America . . . to open a riding-school in New York, Philadelphia, or Chicago . . ."

"No!" exclaimed his father, incredulous, scandalized.

"That's not the worst, alas! The day before I arrived he had a heart-to-heart talk with Signor Castelnuovo. He said he was tired of carousing and doing nothing, that one day or another . . ." And she raised a closed fist to her temple.

"Oh, well," said Alamanni, "when people talk of killing themselves they rarely do it! In any case, you know now how things stand. Could I permit my son, so long as I can prevent him, from taking a step of such importance in the first pet of a love affair gone wrong? Does it strike you that Oliviero is ready for the test he is so eager to face just because he is ignorant of its true significance? Disappointments in love, in young people, are like burns. They hurt like fury, but soon they pass, and one forgets all about them."

The talk was not lacking in good sense, and it was delivered with such assurance that Donna Edvige, in her bewildered state of mind, could think of nothing to fight back with. Suppose her husband were right, as he often was! Suppose Oliviero really wanted to go to Africa to forget an unhappy love! Wouldn't that wound heal with a little patience? But as she thought over in the course of the afternoon all that her husband had said, the persuasive quality in it that at first had silenced her was somewhat dimmed. She began to doubt again, though not to such an extent that her view of her son's revolt as the sole cause of his desperate conduct appealed to her with the same force as formerly.

Accolti for his part was disposed to yield to Oliviero.

"That Oliviero," he said, later that day, while calling on Donna Edvige, "may have had some unhappy affair of the heart is quite possible. What more natural at his age? But his obsession with Africa has deeper roots. When

it first came into his head, I remember, it was a boyish romantic idea, and I told him so. Now it has grown into something serious, very serious, because it has become involved with many other generous sentiments. . . .

"As for General Baratieri's resignation, I have heard nothing; but I wouldn't take so tragic a view of the situation even if the report were true. Your husband, luckily, is not acquainted with Jobopolis and its cute ways. The moment any sensible bureaucrat spies a difficulty or a danger in the offing, he scoots to shelter behind a document. Baratieri is an old wolf: he sees a storm gathering over the Abyssinian uplands and he wants to be able to say, if anything happens tomorrow, 'Well, I warned you in time!'"

"But isn't that the very way to bring on a catastrophe?"

"No, I think there's no danger, because we are not ready for a real war. That sounds like a paradox, but it's the truth. With the slight forces our general has at his disposal, he will not be so crazy as to repeat the stupid maneuver of the Egyptians twenty years ago: he will entrench himself in his camp behind reliable artillery. The Abyssinians on their side will not be such dolts as to assault him. The two armies will do battle the way they used to do in the eighteenth century. They will sit down at respectful distances from each other until both tire. Then they will go home, each shouting at the top of its lungs, 'Victory, victory!' War is a tragi-comedy, Signora! Wouldn't you like to take a bet that if Oliviero goes to Africa, he will come back home without having seen even the face of an Abyssinian?"

Donna Edvige was about to call her carriage when Donna Giuditta came to pay her a little visit of greeting on her return. The hidden demon that tormented that bluestocking's restless soul must have been more nervous than usual that day. Her talk and her manner of speaking were as garrulous and voluble as they were disconnected. Without warning, à propos of a very innocent

phrase dropped by Donna Edvige, "the beautiful Judith" delivered a very strange jest.

"What fools men are! Now they all think I'm an intellectual. Not one of them has had the brains to see that I am a libertine! One of these days I'll be eloping with my coachman!"

Donna Edvige smiled at the sally, but it had a deeper significance for her in connection with her own worries. So a mysterious demon was tormenting that creature too, surrounded as she was by so many estimable gifts of Nature and Fortune—wealth, intelligence, culture, probity, honor, consideration. Always that same volcano of the senses, which when not in active eruption, seemed to slumber at least in all human beings except herself, ever ready to bury reason and wisdom under torrents of passionate lava. That same dark insurgence of the flesh forever lashing men and women, as though the human race had no other interest than to preserve itself! What if the secret demon that was tormenting Oliviero were a twin brother to the beautiful Judith's? What if he were being consumed by that same passionate lava that seethed in all creatures save a few elect? After a month or two of patience would not the eruption subside?

These thoughts were in her mind as she alighted at six o'clock, in front of the great portal of the basilica of San Giovanni where her confessor lived. In such straits she had resolved to have even the counsel of the Church! She confided to the prelate all that she knew herself or had heard from others; and she replied patiently to all the questions the kindly Monsignor put to her, with circumspect ponderance, in order to weigh things well before giving any opinion. In the end the churchman's advice was one of those prudent counsels with which ecclesiastical wisdom tries not to lose a commonplace good under the allurement of a better too difficult to attain:

"Your husband is right! Underneath your boy's trouble lies a disappointed passion: the rest is embroidery, decoration, disguise. Young men are made that way; they are

always thinking of girls even when they talk astronomy or politics. In our case we should choose our medicine bearing in mind that the disease we have to cure is love. Would war be such a good remedy? There can be no doubt about the answer. Love is a passion that tends by its very nature toward the dramatic and even the tragic. What we need, then, is a sedative, not an exhilarant—something ordinary, humdrum, even banal. . . . The best cure for an irregular passion is a good wife. I would find one for him! Oliviero is too sensitive a temperament for a war against barbarians. I have never believed, myself, that the Army was his real vocation! Oh, he would distinguish himself, I am sure of that—but at what cost and with what profit? The boy is going through a phase of inner conflict in which the two individuals which each of us has within, one good, the other bad, have locked horns. We must keep an eye on him, stand by him, help the good one to win—but without interfering too much! If he were still a believer, we could do more for him ourselves. But what we cannot do, you, his mother, can do. Don't leave him alone! Have him come on to Rome at once; or if he shrinks from that, take him to one of your country places, keep him busy, and amused. . . . He loves you so devotedly that your company will be a medicine in itself. It might even be a good idea to have him recalled to the regiment. . . ."

Had the Marquis confronted Donna Edvige with a little gentleness and patience on her return from this visit, he might have been able to give the decisive impact to her vacillating will, won her to his side, made her his ally in bidding Oliviero not to hasten any decision, to bide his time, come to Rome, and wait. . . . A man who understood women, and especially good women, would have guessed the proper move and seized the opportunity as it flitted by. But the poor man—we must call him "poor" despite the many millions he possessed and the still more millions popular imagination credited to him—did not know how to love, however much he may have wished to;

and he did not understand. . . . When his real tactics would have been to turn to his wife in all the persuasive gentleness of a love illumined by good sense, he fled.

For three days, Donna Edvige sat alone at the family board, because her husband was always lunching and dining out. For three days she scarcely set eyes on him except for some fleeting moment. He would come in, change his clothes, and be off again—on very urgent business. Home at night in the wee morning hours, he would leave "for the office" without seeing her. Never in all his life had the Marquis Alamanni been so busy!

Instead, this was all a flight on his part—and a deliberate one. He had forgiven the prodigal son—of course he had! He stood ready to sacrifice the fattest calf in the barn for the prodigal's return! He had forgiven even that rancor which the boy harbored in his soul in the place repentance should have occupied. But forgiveness had not freed the Marquis from that irritable languor of will, that weariness of soul, that faltering of heart which, after his son's revolt, had made another man of him. Hope that Oliviero would return to his senses, become the longed-for continuator of the Alamanni dynasty, had revived for a moment when Donna Edvige left for Paris and from Paris, later, sent word that she was leaving with Oliviero on her way back to Rome. But the hope had died again, and died forever, when Donna Edvige came home, not with the boy, but with that message from him. He had found his son again; but he had also lost him—and because his son was not his, but his mother's. Oliviero was one of those "eccentrics" who are born to destroy the work of your real men, all muscle and brawn, like himself! Foolish, foolish man! Into his power and wealth he had introduced the deadly germ; and the fortune-blessed toil of his generation and the two before it would come to naught through his son! In former days of occasional readings in history, he had met sovereigns of ages past who had exiled, disinherited, executed their sons. He had thought of such as monsters then. . . . Now he understood! He understood

that to save a dynasty it is sometimes necessary to wax merciless upon one's own blood, to correct deviations in heredity! Oh, that he too were living in one of those harsh ages when paternal love was cuirassed in steel!

Unluckily he was living in the most humane age humanity had known. He was living at the end of that extraordinary century which had denied Christ in theology only to become the first truly Christian era (Christian in family life, in morals, in laws, in every sphere of existence) in the history of that city over which Christ and Antichrist were reigning side by side, secretly allied under seemingly hostile externals. And he had been disarmed by the law, the morals, the brotherly love which, in the sublime recklessness of his period, he too had allowed to ripen in his heart of jasper. Paganism married to Christianity by a syndic and a priest had unwittingly laid itself open to the enemy spirit and softened under it. Alamanni understood at last that as a founder of dynasties he had failed in his life's ambition. His arms and armor gone, impotent to strike down his son, he had to love him, and to love him the more, the more grievously his son disappointed him! If the boy were not the son he had hoped for, he was nevertheless a son, his son, one of the three people to whom his heart had become most attached, and the one to whom it was most passionately attached because in him and with him he had hoped to live after death, and the one from whom no power could now detach him. From the ruins of shattered hopes rose love, love embittered and disappointed but indestructible; and love no longer for a double, for a second self, projected into the future in the image of his own strength and fortune, but for a dear one who was sick and in need of protection and assistance. It was a beginning of maternal weakness in an iron heart which age and love, with the help of time, of Christ, and, in a measure, of Antichrist too, had softened!

Donna Edvige had found her husband more averse than ever to his son's intent because, now convinced that Oli-

viero was, as he said, "an eccentric," he was concerned to protect him from a "folly," prevent him from facing tests too great for his strength. Imagine a boy who went off the handle over the troubles of a servant girl, facing an army of wild savages in Africa!

That was why Alamanni avoided his wife. He was afraid of her. He was awed more than usual by that passionate will of hers, that romantic temerity, that—as he called it—that proud and obstinate infallibility. He had been as deeply shaken by Donna Edvige's remarks as she had been by his. He saw that his son's decision was more serious than he had been willing to believe, that in continuing to say "No" he would be assuming a responsibility greater than he had supposed. . . . He stood dismayed before that threat of suicide at which his wife had hinted. "When people talk of killing themselves, they rarely do it!" he had answered lightly. But that aphorism did not convince him so readily now!

For the first time in his life he found himself in an anguished hesitation. He stood terrified before that "Yes" and that "No" between which he had to choose! He was afraid his wife would lead him back to that dolorous alternative, and he complained petulantly to himself that he was always the victim. "Me, always me! Everything in this house has to fall on me!—I make all the decisions. I take all the responsibilities! Must I be the one to decide, once and for all, whether to send, or not to send, our boy to his death? Supposing I weren't here? Supposing Edvige had to decide for herself? Knowing what I know, would she say to her only son: 'Yes, run right along and get slaughtered!'?"

Donna Edvige felt more alone during those three days than she had ever been since the first years of her marriage when Oliviero was a baby. Her son was far away. Her husband was avoiding her. In that solitude, comforted only by talks with Accolti, she returned little by little to her first conviction that Oliviero was trying to free himself from his father's tyranny of love, and not

just to numb a disappointment of the heart, as her husband and her confessor supposed and as she had been willing to admit under their pressure. That she should veer back and forth between the two possibilities was natural enough. Both were true! Here indeed stood two truths, not opposite but partial truths, and no alchemist of imponderable spiritual essences would have been able to discover which of the two weighed a grain the more. . . . Oliviero was in revolt because his mistress had deserted him; and also because Justice had been violated and Truth falsified, before his eyes. No man—God alone—could have decided whether his revolt were based on the one reason more than on the other. But the more she inclined to this partial truth, taking it as the whole truth, the more it pained her to think of her son desperately waiting at Chambéry for the news of freedom; and every day she sent him two, three, four telegrams begging him to be patient, cheering him with good hopes that the decision he desired was about to mature. But she was now determined within herself to wring the consent Oliviero was seeking from her husband. All her doubts and secret fears had vanished.

On the evening of the third day, when her husband came in, as was usual now, to change his clothes and be off to a banquet, she forced the privacy of his apartment, surprised him while he was dressing, and said to him firmly:

"Augusto, I have to have a talk with you! We must come to a decision! Tell me when I can see you—this evening, tomorrow morning, when you wish—but we must!"

Her husband looked at her a moment, then he said:

"Edvige, the argument which you are trying to renew for the thousandth time is useless. For my part, I have made my decision. No! Oliviero is not going to Africa! That is my opinion, and no argument will change me! I know Oliviero. I know the world. I believe I would be failing in my duty if I did not do my utmost to save him from this act of folly. . . . To withdraw my veto would

be equivalent to signing a death warrant for the boy—bear that well in mind! However, I am a constitutional monarch. I regard my authority in this house as coördinate with yours. If I am Oliviero's father, you are his mother. You are as wise as I am, and perhaps wiser. You can decide yourself and even better than I, because your wisdom is enlightened by a mother's love. That is why I tell you: don't waste time trying to persuade me! It will be labor lost! But since I recognize that, in a matter of such importance, your authority is as great as mine, I am willing to abide wholly by your decision. So then—remember all that I have said, give it due weight, and make up your mind. If then you are really of the opinion that Oliviero should go away, I will write to the Minister. The decision will be yours, but yours also must be the responsibility. I put our son in your hands. You are a woman so great of heart and of mind that you will surely reach the conclusion that is best for him and for us. . . . Will that do?"

Modesty quite aside, Alamanni considered that this move, which he had thought out as the best device for escaping from the dilemma his wife had posed to him, was one of the master-strokes of his life as a master strategist. He could not imagine his wife sending their son to death. So, while paying a chivalrous homage to her consortship he would be obliging her to join hands with him in saying "No." Given his own perplexity, her aid and consent would be a great comfort to him at just that moment. But in addition, in his usual way, he would be getting what he wanted, and credit for yielding too!

But Donna Edvige, at first, was not at all disturbed by this strange and unexpected abdication. On the contrary, her spirit was flooded with a strange sereneness. The knot, the inextricable knot, was untied, at last, and in so simple and easy a manner! Oliviero wanted to become a man, after having for so long been the Benjamin of a father who loved him without knowing how to love. . . . He might, to be sure, have chosen a less perilous avenue to

freedom, but after all, he was no longer a child. He had a right to do what he wished with himself. Had he not been the son of his father, could he not have gone to Africa when he chose? Why should he alone of all men be deprived of his rights? In asking her husband to withdraw his arbitrary veto, she, for her part, was not signing a death-warrant; she was restoring to her son a freedom of action which his father's overbearing affection had been trying to confiscate! If Oliviero asked her advice, she would try to dissuade him, but she would not despair if he should persist in his plan. What, after all, was Oliviero asking for, except a chance to serve his country as best he could? If his desire itself were a noble one, why go into his deeper motives—disappointment or resentment, as these might be? The boy would be giving an example to the rich young men of his country, all too ready to make Italy great and powerful by gossiping in the cafés! Were there dangers? Might not his noble zeal be sacrificed to the irresponsibility and incompetence of Power? Perhaps! But her ancestors had served the King of France and the King of Sardinia! Had they stopped to ask whether there were any danger in such service, whether in peace or in war? They had done their duty, and no questions asked!

Among such thoughts she dwelt, calm, serene, almost happy, until nine o'clock struck in the great salon of the palace. Then she went to her bedroom, told her maid she would have no need of her, and finally sat down at her little writing-table to make up the telegram which would announce to her son that all difficulties had been smoothed away and that his father was giving him full freedom of decision. The boy had been waiting for that message for four days! What great relief it would be sure to give him! Yet she had delayed writing it those two or three hours for reasons she herself could not have explained! But there at last it was, in black on white! She corrected it. She recopied it. Then she raised her hand to ring the bell for a footman—he would take it to the office. . . .

But she arrested the hand in mid-air, as a thought took

possession of her. Once delivered to the footman, once in the office, the irrevocable step would be taken! And then—if her husband were right, if her confessor were right? If Oliviero were rushing, out of disappointed love, to face a test greater than his strength? If a few days, weeks, months even, of patience would bring him calm again?

She tried to drive the thought away, but it would not down. Rather it changed into a great fear. What if he never came back again? What if smallpox, typhoid, the plague, a bullet . . . What if he were just among the missing and they never heard of him again? Vainly she marshaled her other thoughts to combat this terror. But it would have none of dialectic! It welled up like a great heaving wave from the depths of her being. The sheer horror of the inhuman sacrifice submerged all other thoughts. No! No! That boy had been her one reward for the sacrifice of her marriage. He had been the one consolation of her lonely life. She could not lose him now! She would not lose him! Wealth, health, position, yes, all those she would give up; but her boy, never! A strange presentiment suddenly laid hold on her. If Oliviero went to Africa, he might fall prisoner to those savages! Her family were close friends of the Savoiroux. One of the Savoiroux had gone to Africa as an explorer, and had tasted prison life among the Abyssinians. All the particulars of that horrifying experience passed through her mind, and she applied them to her son. She could see Oliviero in chains, starved, beaten, driven under the lash, as her husband had said, to till the fields of a *ras!* Was she mad? How could she ever have dreamed that Oliviero was tempered to such trials? Her husband was right! Oliviero himself had confessed as much: "I am afraid of Africa too, you know!" She tore up the telegram and sat down at the desk again. Here was another! Oliviero should hurry to Rome at once!

But she stopped with the message half copied. A new thought! "There is an ugly demon in me, mamma! There

in Rome it will get me!" It was not alone what the priest had said, that the evil in the boy was fighting a battle with the good! That evil was threatening victory! Oliviero, her son, her boy, had appealed to her: the rescue must be prompt, and not of any ordinary kind! And what if Africa were really that rescue, as Oliviero thought it was, in full consciousness of the perils attending it? Who was she to sell his soul to save his body? What cowardice! What treachery to blood of her blood, flesh of her flesh! A crime unworthy of her and of her family tradition! She would die rather! Oh, if hers were the life at stake, hers the body to be sacrificed! But no, the body and the soul were body and soul of her son's, of the child who had dried her tears with his gayety during those ten terrible years of her unhappiness.

At a certain moment her conflicting emotions seemed to take the form of an irrepressible muscular restlessness. She rose from the desk, and began to walk the room excitedly back and forth. The quiet and solitude about her, which an hour before had seemed so cheerful and so necessary, now all but smothered her. She needed air, company, counsel! Some one to help her, give her light! But alas, alas, only one person could give her counsel, help, the light she needed; and for him she would have to wait till the following day! An eternity, it seemed to her, in her impatience to breathe that little comfort!

And her eyes turned upon the clock. . . . Eleven! Only eleven! But Accolti was certainly awake! He studied always till long after midnight. She hesitated a moment, struggling between her dire need and her scruples at such an indiscretion. But she made her resolve, ran to her desk, dashed off a note, rang for the footman and bade him deliver it. Accolti lived in the neighborhood. For the footman to take the message and return would be a matter of a few minutes.

And in the prospect of such imminent relief, Donna Edvige grew a little calmer, though not for long. Sacrifice, she thought—had she done aught else but sacrifice her-

self from childhood—everywhere, for everybody? To save her family had she not made the supreme sacrifice of resigning to torture of flesh and of spirit in marriage? Had she not suffered her long servitude in silence, that no one, not even her unconscious tormentor himself, should be aware of it? Had she not striven to make her tormentor a happy man, a better man, with a heart less hard and a temper less violent? Had she ever complained that the burden was greater than she could bear? One recompense only she had asked—a child, a son who would be good, generous, noble. And now . . . this to be her reward, that God should demand of her this sacrifice of Isaac? And her sorrow changed imperceptibly into anger, and the anger into a spirit of revolt. What an outrage, that after having suffered so much in marriage, she should have to suffer also in her son! So many sacrifices gave her some deserts—a right to be happy in a happy child!

And in the bitterness of her resentment against fate, for a moment she too relapsed into common humanity. Like all other human beings in misfortune, she would willingly have hated some one, something, that not only she should suffer. No one had ever loved her except her father! No one had ever understood her except Accolti! The world had been ungrateful, malign. It had played her false. Everybody had exploited her ingenuousness, her weakness, her helpfulness—an instinct she could not resist because it was stronger than she, simpleton that she had been! If there was any justice in the Hereafter . . . and she thought the "if" with an almost God-scorning defiance.

But if her husband did not know how to love, Donna Edvige did not know how to hate. An inconsequential detail turned the direction of her thoughts. She suddenly observed that it was half-past eleven. The footman had been gone more than a half hour! Why had he not returned? Accolti lived so near! And immediately she guessed. Tired out by a hard day's work, the Count had gone to bed early and she had awakened him! He had been dressing all this time! And the woman who, a moment be-

fore, had felt an irritated rancor at a world that demanded her sacrifices, began reproaching herself as for an act of inconsiderate selfishness. Twenty minutes! It was nearly midnight! Donna Edvige's remorse was growing by leaps and bounds. But at last a shuffling of footsteps and a timid knock on her door warned her that the footman had returned. No, Accolti was still awake! But the building had been locked! He had had to rouse the janitor. The Count had come with him to the palace. He was waiting in the drawing-room.

"But what has happened?" asked Accolti anxiously as Donna Edvige entered. "Tell me, tell me. . . ."

"You must forgive me, Accolti. . . ." she began; and she recounted the whole story of her doubts and misgivings. Was Oliviero going to Africa to revenge an unhappy love, or was it really a yearning for expiation, an aspiration for manhood?

But Accolti broke in upon her vehemently:

"Signora, I beg of you, do not doubt Oliviero, you who are his mother! Oliviero is of the race that breeds saints and heroes . . ."

"How I wish you were right! . . . But what I know of the world he has been living in . . ."

"That doesn't matter! It doesn't matter! Men are not women, that, if they are pure, there should be no danger, and impure, no help! How many saints began by sowing wild oats? I know little about his affairs, but if Oliviero had made debts a mountain high, and wasted twice as much money and time at gambling and with women of loose lives, I would not change my opinion. He is your son. He will rise to all the renunciations and all the sacrifices that make this wretched humanity of ours respectable. . . . This crisis in his life is after the manner of Saint Francis. . . ."

Such words coming from the person she trusted most in the world fell like balm on Donna Edvige's sorrowing heart. Taking courage, she told Accolti of her first decision and desired his advice regarding it.

Accolti did not hesitate:

"Signora, as I have said many times, I am convinced that there is not great danger down there. But let us suppose that your husband is right: I say just the same—and not with a light heart—do not hesitate! Pray do not be offended at a presumption perhaps overbold—but Oliviero I consider as in a sense a child of my own. . . . If anything should happen to him down there, the person to suffer most next to you would be myself. . . . And yet I say again, let him go! He may have had a mistress who has deserted him. But that is not why he wants to go to Africa. He wants to go to Africa because, all of a sudden, he has seen looming before his eyes the most terrible of the 'whys' that a noble soul can ask itself today—why there are so many injustices in the world, why the good are oppressed and the wicked triumphing. That's the terrible question that Job has been twisting and turning on his dunghill for so many centuries to solve, desperately begging an answer of men and of God. Two hundred years ago in the days of Renzo and Lucia, the answer seemed easy. Everybody believed that God would mend in the world to come the things He had left askew in this one. A sermon of Fra Cristoforo's, or a blessing of Cardinal Borromeo's, was enough in any case to settle the 'why.' But today a part of the world is no longer content with such explanations. You will say it's a pity: I ought to tell you it's a good thing, but I haven't the courage to say such a thing this evening, especially to you. I will tell you, instead, that for better or for worse, that is the way things stand; and for that reason human affairs have become more complicated, very much more complicated, than they were half a dozen generations ago. Where find in our world the answer that any one could once find by just opening the door of the first church he came to? No one knows! Yet we have got to find it somewhere in this ugly world, since we no longer have the patience to wait for it in the world to come. Well, Oliviero is going out to look for it in Africa—not only on

his own behalf, but on ours too. An absurd idea—you will tell me! Measured by the rule of the three R's, I agree: but do you, you especially, care to impose the rule of practical wisdom on a great inexperienced soul that is puzzling over that 'why'? Can you not feel the grandeur of a madness that purifies the cake of wealth which has been gathering for two centuries on the walls of this palace of a libertine Cardinal, making of it a new and more sublime dunghill of a modern Job? That is why I ask you—what right have we to chain Oliviero to this place? I don't say urge him to go to Africa. What I say is, now that you have a chance, give him back his freedom to follow his heart's desire. Will he meet sorrow and danger? Not finding what he seeks in Africa, will he go on to the end of the world? But, Signora, if things are going as they are today it's precisely because so few of us are willing to suffer or serve unselfishly any more—a very, very few of us, the last remnants of a great world that has vanished, the first heralds of a great world that is being born. We still know how to suffer and serve! Suppose we too refuse, what will happen to this poor world? You have given to all of us the most luminous example of unselfish service and silent suffering for others. Now that Oliviero is going out in search of suffering and sacrifice, would you shrink from the test like any one of the many hysterical mammas who are the affliction of our times? Would you strip him of his genuine nobility, to plunge him into the morass of mediocrity that surrounds us? It is not for me, lost infidel that I am, to bid you put your trust in the Lord. That would be ridiculous. But let me tell you: at this moment I am certain Oliviero will come home after having suffered, after having suffered much, but steeled, ripened, brought nearer to that state of heroic purity in which his soul—I vouch for it—is trying to crystallize at any cost . . . But it can crystallize only in the furnace of experience. And suppose I were mistaken—suppose destiny had disposed otherwise? Would it not be our duty to bow our heads, as we do before so many other

mysteries even more mysterious to me and to you—why, for example, Susanna has to be dying in prison, buried under an avalanche of false accusations? We have to face destiny, that's all—and you at least believe in a justice beyond this world. . . ."

The martial fanfare that had the power to reinflame that faltering courage had sounded. When Accolti left, Donna Edvige no longer felt alone. He had found the word to reach her heart: he considered Oliviero his own son! How true, how true that was! He had been Oliviero's spiritual father all along! He had tried not to spoil him with money and with vain ideas of grandeur, but to make him study, to guide him, improve him. And that this second father, the true father according to the spirit, should approve her first thought of restoring freedom of choice to her child, was for her—more than a consolation—a liberation! Supported by Accolti's heroic recklessness, she hesitated no longer. She saw clearly again, as she had seen at first, but this time with a certainty that had been missing in that first intuition. She went back to her bedroom with a weight gone from her soul. She sat down on a little divan, leaned her elbows on her knees, took her temples between her hands, thinking. . . .

. . . Thinking of a moment far, far back in the first years of her marriage, on the thought of which she never allowed herself to linger, of a moment in which she had asked herself whether that one great love which she had never experienced were not coming into being in her heart. She had loved everything and everybody—God, Christ, the Virgin, her parents, her brothers and sisters, her son, her friends, the poor, the unhappy, the needy, animals, all things good and beautiful in creation. But was not here another kind of love, the love men and women feel for one another, a love for him, for the saint unhallowed? A great moment, a tremendous moment. . . . Fortunately Accolti had not remarked it! In dwelling on it for a second now, her soul thrilled with a warmth of infinite tenderness.

But she raised her eyes and they fell on an image of the Virgin that was hanging at the head of her bed—a marvelous plaque of Luini's. The sweet youthful face of the happy Virgin with the Child in her arms called to her mind one of the most sublime paintings ever issued from the brush of man, the "Deposition" of Botticelli, which she had admired at Munich in her travels about the world. It was a Mother no longer young and smiling, but older and sad, and not with the bouncing Babe in her arms but with the body of a young man, her Son, on her knees, her eyes closed in horror. Those two faces! Were they not the two faces of Life and of Duty? That Woman too, the First among all women, and the most beloved of the Lord, had known the intoxication of love and of joy in her child; and she too had followed Him along the thorny pathways of His brief existence, to gather Him into her lap from a gallows-tree of shame, red and bleeding from the blows of an Injustice calling itself Justice. Why was she complaining if she too had to suffer a little in her son for some of the sacred things of this world—for Truth and Justice? Was not that the sublime duty and the tragic privilege of all mothers? She alone would prove cowardly? Could she put away the Divine Cross of the few magnanimous who would not barter it for all the treasures on earth? Could she proclaim herself the most ungrateful of women when she ought to be thanking God every day because He had given her so many opportunities to suffer a little in order to make some one of her fellow creatures happy? Yes, that, just that, had been the paradoxical happiness of her existence. And she had been crowned with a supreme consolation—a son who bore her imprint upon his soul as he bore her lineaments on his features. Who, indeed, had been happier than she? And a great peace descended upon her soul, and her soul was filled with the power of determined sacrifice. Her doubts vanished. Her duty stood clear before her, bright gleaming above the misleading fogs of passion in the sadness of a spirit purified. And the Virgin looked down upon

her from the painting and, as she well knew, from the dome of High Heaven too, reading in her heart and in her son's heart. She fell to her knees in a long silent prayer. Her lips did not move, but her whole soul lifted its voice to the Mother of all mothers, who knew, because she had experienced it, what it meant to be tortured in a son. Passionately, desperately, she prayed. If the sacrifice of a life were necessary, let it be her life, her life!

The next morning Alamanni was in his library at eight o'clock working busily among his papers like a man not disturbed by very disquieting worries. Suddenly Donna Edvige came in, a little pale, but tranquil withal. She stepped forward to the writing-desk:

"I have decided, Augusto!" she said. "I will take the responsibility—all of it. Write to the Minister of War! Ask him to send Oliviero to Africa!"

The Marquis half rose in a start from his chair.

"You are crazy!"

The thought almost burst from his lips.

But he managed to repress it. Once again, as so many times before in other straits, he sensed in the determined gentleness before him that mysterious superiority of his wife's whereby his power had always been obliged to yield to her weakness whenever she willed in earnest. There she was again, the same woman, incomparable and inexplicable, bidding him with an imperious and strangely tranquillizing firmness to make the most absurd and cruel of sacrifices imaginable for them both: his son! He did not understand, he could not understand, unhappy man, that in that woman so sweet and so good, whom he had loved so much because she had taught him to love to the slight extent he was capable of loving, forty centuries of Judaism and twenty centuries of Christianity towered inflexible to snatch a soul from his Roman and pagan ambitions of hereditary grandeur and send it forth to danger, to sorrow, and to perfection: *per crucem ad lucem.*

He could not understand, but he felt that resistance would be vain, and this time too he yielded.

He settled deep into his chair, with his head thrown back, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling. He sat silent for a time in the relaxation of despondent sorrow. At length he drew himself up, reached for a piece of paper, picked up his pen, thought a moment, and then slowly wrote, choosing his words and phrases:

"To the Minister of War.

"Your Excellency:

"My son has come back again to his idea of going to Africa. He insists that he must contribute his share to the defense of the splendid colony which the genius and courage of the man who is today, to our good fortune, in power, has so materially expanded. I would have preferred, for the reasons I have stated to you, to have him wait a few months more. But I can no longer resist his patriotic enthusiasm. Proud of being able to offer my only son to my country, I beg you to find some post for him among the troops that are in Eritrea or are about to be sent there!"

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